

How do mainstream teachers make sense of their role in terms of ‘every teacher is a teacher of special needs’? What constraints do they face? How can the SENco help?

Paul Blum

Institute of Education, University of London

This thesis is submitted for the Degree of PhD

Abstract

This is a case study undertaken in a large urban comprehensive school where the author was the SENco. The research set out to find out how mainstream subject teachers handled the expectation that they could all be special needs teachers within their own class rooms. But had the teachers really embraced that challenge and how did they go about making it a daily reality? The first part of the research investigated through a whole teaching staff questionnaire and followed on with a deeper investigation of the issues raised, by interviewing six participant teachers. Five of those teachers also agreed to partnership teach with the SENco through the 2012/13 academic year to help assess the development of their differentiation strategies. Alongside this research, the SENco kept a journal of critical incidents that charted daily life in that job role. In particular the way that the pressures of that complex job description inhibited the ability to support mainstream colleagues.

The research revealed that teachers had a strong preoccupation with pupils with behavioural and emotional issues and tended to prioritise this type of special needs beyond all others. The shortage of time experienced by both the SENco and the mainstream teachers meant that differentiation was often unprepared and spontaneous between the two parties in the class room, though this was not necessarily ineffective. Mainstream teachers used pedagogical models that they found very tiring and consequently, they often did not exploit the opportunity to differentiate by moving around the classroom and interacting 'one to one' with members of the class, after the initial teacher exposition was over.

The research concludes that it is difficult for the mainstream teachers to be wholly effective teachers of special needs pupils. There was a shortage of time for lesson preparation and planning as well as pressure to follow the directives of school managers to monitor pupil progress in prescriptive ways laid down by the government.

Contents.

Abstract	2
Contents	4
List of tables	10
List of appendices	10
Declaration of word count	10
Declaration of own work	10
Acknowledgements	11
Chapter 1: Introduction	12
1.1 Every teacher is a teacher of special needs	12
1.2 Career History in schools	12
1.3 An insider accounts of the SENco in a secondary school	13
1.4 Development of research questions	14
1.5 Continuing professional development	16
1.6 Positioning myself as a researcher	
1.7 The Research questions	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review Part One. Differentiation and the concept of inclusive teaching.	18
2.1 Chapter outline	18
2.2 Models of differentiation	18
2.3 Research on teaching methods for pupils with learning difficulties	20
2.4 Research on teacher attitudes towards working in an inclusive classroom with pupils with learning difficulties	23
2.5 The Government's changing position on inclusion and the responsibility of teachers to teach pupils with learning difficulties	24
2.6 Effective teacher training for working with pupils with learning difficulties	26
2.7 'The learning without limits project' and it's importance to research on inclusion	30

2.8 Chapter Summary	33
Chapter 3: School performativity and inclusion as the context in which mainstream teachers and school SENcos work	35
3.1 Chapter Outline	35
3.2 A critique of the school performativity agenda	35
3.2.1 The blame culture	37
3.2.2 Teacher resilience to the surveillance culture	41
3.3 Non deferential learning. Initiate, Respond and Evaluate (IRE) and it's effects in the classroom	43
3.4 The case for school performativity	46
3.5 Performativity and the inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties	49
3.6 Chapter Summary	50
Chapter 4: The Special Needs context. The history and development of Government policy and legislation	51
4.1 Chapter Outline	51
4.2 Historical background to special needs provision	51
4.3 The emerging role of the SENco in the English Educational system	57
4.4 Chapter Summary	60
Chapter 5 Methodology	61
5.1 introduction	61
5.2 Rationale for research methodology	61
5.2.2 Ethnography	63
5.2.3 Auto-ethnography	64
5.2.4 Advocacy ethnography	65
5.2.5 Case studies	66
5.2.6 Action research	66
5.3 The research methodology	68
5.4 The case study school	69
5.5 Research design	69
5.5.1 The questionnaire	70

5.5.2 The interviews	70
5.5.3 Partnership teaching	73
5.5.4 Diary – Critical incident journal	73
5.6 Reliability of research data	74
5.7 Validity of research data	75
5.8 Ethical issues in this research	76
5.9 Confidentiality in the research model	77
5.10 An overview of the analysis of data	77
5.11 Chapter summary	78
Chapter 6: Analysis of the questionnaire data	80
6.1 Introduction	80
6.2 Size and structure of the sample	80
6.3 Analysis of individual questions	80
6.3.1 Meeting the needs of pupils with SEN in class	80
6.3.2 Being comfortable as a teacher of SEN	81
6.3.3 Staff training for teaching children with SEN	82
6.3.4 Training perceived to be useful	83
6.3.5 Perceptions of the most challenging types of SEN	85
6.3.6 Differentiation strategies adopted	86
6.3.7 Strategies that teachers would like to improve	87
6.3.8 Key obstacles to greater differentiation for SEN pupils	88
6.4 Summary questionnaire findings	90
6.5 Chapter summary	91
Chapter 7: The interviews	92
7.1 Chapter outline	92
7.2 Context of the interviews	92
7.2.1 Spontaneous answers in the interview	93
7.2.2 Semi-Structured interviews	94

7.2.3 Presentation of the interviews	94
7.3 Interview 1 –Tony	95
7.4 Interview 2 – Lucy	100
7.5 Interview 3 – Roy	106
7.6 Interview 4 – Ursula	114
7.7 Interview 5 – Robyn	119
7.8 Interview 6 – Wendy	124
7.9 Chapter summary	129
Chapter 8: An overview of the questionnaire and the interview data	130
8.1 Chapter outline	130
8.2 The profile of the sample interviewees	130
8.3 Time constraints	130
8.4 The issue of Emotional behavioural difficulty	131
8.5 The motivational mind set as a crucial teaching strategy	133
8.6 Managing challenging behaviour	135
8.7 Teaching loads, marking and assessment and preparation time	135
8.8 Performativity	136
8.9 Pupil diversity	137
8.10 Improved training	138
8.11 The role of the SENco	139
8.12 Chapter summary	141
Chapter 9: A description of partnership teaching relationships and analysis of what can be learned from them	142
9.1 Chapter outline	142
9.2 Partnership teaching with Tony	142
9.3 Partnership teaching with Roy	147
9.4 Partnership teaching with Robyn	153
9.5 Partnership teaching with Ursula	157
9.6 Partnership teaching with Wendy	159

9.7 Overall findings on SENco input into partnership teaching	162
9.7.1 Anchor teacher/supporting role teacher	162
9.7.2 Partnership Oracy. Differentiation by repartee	164
9.7.3 Importance of building a trusting and relaxed relationships	165
9.7.4 The limitations to oral differentiation imposed by IRE	166
9.7.5 Time consuming differentiation methods that can create Classroom management problems	167
9.7.6 Exam requirements	168
9.7.7 It is hard to change practice	168
9.8 Self reflexivity	168
9.9 Chapter summary	169
Chapter 10: The critical incident journal	170
10.1 Chapter outline	170
10.2 The critical Incident journal. How it was constructed	170
10.3 Statemented pupils with Emotional Behavioural Difficulties and the problems that they have created for the Greenfield SENco	171
10.3.1 Enrico's case	171
10.3.2 Johnny's case	173
10.4 The 'dyslexia' lobby and the pressure it puts on the SENco at Greenfield	177
10.5 Making inclusion work is more difficult in a secondary school than a primary school	179
10.6 The inspection system and the way in inhibits the work of SENco at Greenfield.	181
10.7 The leadership and Management of the learning support assistants	182
10.7.1 LSA's wish for teacher status	183
10.7.2 LSA's relationships with the mainstream teaching staff	184
10.8 Overall Conclusions	186
10.9 Chapter summary	186
Chapter 11 Discussion	187

11.1 Introduction	187
11.2 Making sense of the role 'every teacher is a teacher of special needs	187
11.2.1 Setting the scene with the questionnaire	188
11.3 The challenge of pupils with BESD	189
11.4 The challenge to the IRE teaching model	190
11.5 Time constraints	191
11.6 Instantaneous differentiation	192
11.7 Teacher training and CPD	193
11.8 The impact of the performativity agenda	194
11.9 Research question 3. How can the SENco help?	196
11.9.1 The SENco's dilemma of competing roles	197
11.9.2 The Challenge of the BESD pupil to the SENco's time	197
11.9.3 The SENco's management role of teaching assistants	198
11.9.4 The restrictive role of the inspection agenda	199
11.9.5 The complexity of secondary school organisation	199
11.9.6 To what extent can the SENco can influence mainstream practice	199
11.10 Limitations of the research	200
11.11 Implications of this study for policy and practice	201
11.11.1 Categorisation of SEN pupils on school computer Information systems.	201
11.11.2 The integration of pupils categorised as BESD	202
11.11.3 Paperwork and bureaucracy	204
11.11.4 Implications for teacher training	204
11.11.5 Implications for the SENco and mainstream teachers	205
11.12 Conclusions:	206
Key research findings and their implications for my own practice	206
References	209
Appendices	214

List of Appendices.

- Appendix 1** **A copy of the SENco job description at Greenfield.**
- Appendix 2** **Questionnaire to the whole teaching staff at Greenfield.**
- Appendix 3** **List of questions used in the semi structured interviews.**
- Appendix 4** **Extract from a Greenfield School inspection report.**
- Appendix 5** **Interview transcript sample for Roy.**
- Appendix 6** **Extract from the Critical Incident Journal.**

List of Tables.

- Table 6.3.1 Meeting the needs of pupils with SEN in the classroom.
- Table 6.3.2 Being comfortable with the expectation that every teacher is a teacher of special needs
- Table 6.3: The quality of SEN training received during initial teacher education and in school
- Table 6.3.4: Responses to choices relating to Continuing Professional Development
- Table 6.3.5: Perceptions of the most challenging types of Special Educational Needs.
- Table 6.3.6: Percentage responses to most frequently used strategies

Table 6.3.7: Strategies that teachers wished to improve

Table 6.3.8: Obstacles to differentiating for pupils with Special Educational Needs

Declaration of Word Count

76,600 words

Declaration of Own Work

I declare that this PhD thesis is entirely my own work.

Acknowledgements.

I would like to thank Professor Susan Hallam for her tireless support and encouragement for this work. As a full time teacher and SENco, it was hard to find the time to study. I would also like to thank NASEN and Greenfield School for their bursaries that helped finance the study.

Chapter One. Introduction.

1.1 Every teacher is a teacher of special needs

The statement of Inclusion (DES 1999) made it clear that every teacher has a statutory duty to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met in the classes that they teach. The Teacher Development professional standards for Teachers (TDA 2007a) creates an expectation that qualified teachers need to be proficient in developing personalised learning provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs. But how should this be done in an inner city secondary school, serving a socially disadvantaged school population? In this study, I aim to explore my own role as Special Needs Coordinator (often called SENco) in a large inner city secondary school. I shall use the terms SENco and Special Needs Co-ordinator interchangeably in this thesis. I shall be looking closely at my role of supporting mainstream teachers as they respond to the Inclusion agenda 'Every teacher is a teacher of Special Needs'.

1.2 Career history in schools

I was appointed Special Needs Coordinator at Greenfield School (not its real name) in September 2010. It is my second period of being a SENco in a London secondary school. I was previously SENco between 1999 to 2002. I am interested in exploring my role as a SENco in its fullest sense. What should Special Needs Co-ordinators do? I have a detailed role and job description but reality and this description do not necessarily match. My role as SENco was interrupted from 2002 and 2010 when I held positions in senior management as a deputy head teacher and assistant head in London schools. This gives me an interesting strategic perspective about ways of approaching whole school change. In many ways I am one of the most experienced Special Needs Co-ordinators any school is likely to get. Rather than go on to be a head teacher, I stepped back in terms of status, out of the senior leadership team and back into what most schools would describe as a cross curricular middle management position. I did this because I am committed to the work of helping teachers develop their skills as teachers of special educational needs. Once I had got my job at Greenfield School as the SENco, I decided that it was important to research my role and try and answer some important questions about mainstream teaching and special needs, questions that have been formulating in my head for the last thirty years of my career in schools. I have always been interested in school improvement and felt I could make a real contribution to my SENco role. My research project provides me with the opportunity to look into key educational issues, developing my own questions and using my own professional tacit knowledge.

With so much legislation and government guidance making suggestions as to how the role of the SENco should be developed, a practical study examining what it feels like to wrestle with the problems of actually being a SENco faced with daily conflicts and choices would be very timely, in particular, the

relationship between mainstream teachers and the Special Needs Inclusion agenda. How do teachers really approach their task of differentiation in the classroom and how can somebody like me in the role of SENco actually influence this? I hope that the study of myself, as SENco, working with mainstream teachers, will shed some light on the School Improvement and Inclusion debates. Are they compatible or are they necessarily conflicting?

1.3 An insider account of the SENco in a secondary school

There does not appear to be any insider accounts of what the day to day working reality of a secondary school SENco actually is. This type of study in which teachers research into their own practice seems lacking in this particular field of school activity. At the time of writing this introduction, I could only find one complementary study by a teacher of their own practice as a secondary school Special Needs Co-ordinator, Gareth Morewood. However, Morewood (2009) works from a practical 'how to do it' perspective rather than a deeply reflective consideration of what the daily realities of the job are. I felt that some fundamental problems were being neglected as Morewood tried to encourage other practitioners to implement particular models that he had devised himself to improve their practice. Although timely and useful in its way, Morewood's work (2009) was not providing a narrative of daily realities but offering blue prints for improvements without going into the detail of what the problems actually were to start with. This 2009 study did not look in any way at how a SENco like myself should work alongside mainstream teachers.

I have found other research on the role of SENco in schools but believe there is room for more specific research in the secondary school setting. The other major limitation to the research that is currently available is that it is invariably carried out from an outsider's perspective looking in. By that I mean that non-teacher researchers are trying to make sense of the world of the teacher SENco in a school, rather than having the SENco speak with their own voice. The writings of Coles (2005), Kearns (2006), Petersen (2010), Rosen Webb (2011) and many others will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4. Rosen Webb (2011) herself a SENco, worked with a small number of other secondary SENcos to look at the job description and comes closest to covering the areas that I intend to investigate.

1.4 Development of the research questions

My interest in making a difference to pupils with special educational needs is well established. I have written a book about differentiation for special needs pupils with reading difficulties (Blum 2002). I have also looked at some of the problems teachers face in trying to differentiate in inner city classes where the behaviour and motivation of the pupils are a persistent problem (Blum 2006). More recently, I have also started to write fiction stories for pupils with low reading ages (Blum 2007, 2010, 2012). I use *The Extraordinary Files* (2007), *the Matt Merton Mysteries* (2010) and the *Vampire Inc* series

(2012) in all of my specialised reading withdrawal groups. Writing them has kept me focused on just how important creating materials for children with a low reading age is in all aspects of the modern curriculum if we are to have a chance of including many disaffected teenage pupils. All these writing and teaching experiences combined with some interesting periods of time in senior management, against the back drop of an externally conducted school improvement agenda, have made me more interested in what the real issues around mainstream teachers and differentiation for special needs pupils really are. How far is it possible for every teacher to be a teacher of Special Needs pupils? In what ways can the SENco support that agenda?

I have used my daily life as a SENco in a large inner city secondary school as the basis for my study. I wanted to produce a piece of research which highlighted the expertise that teachers use to include a variety of pupils with learning difficulties in their classrooms. I wanted to investigate how I could use my role as the Special Needs Co-ordinator to work alongside them in the classroom to help them increase their confidence as teachers of special needs pupils in our teaching community - Greenfield School. I wanted to create a narrative which would interrogate the priorities of the current school improvement agenda for pupils with SEN.

All of my writing throughout my professional life, so far, has been concerned with what the practical working day reality is like for teachers in inner city secondary schools and how it could be improved. A fact that has interested me throughout my career is why teachers are routinely asked to do things by those in leadership positions, without reference to where the time to do them will come from. Going back to my first book *Surviving and Succeeding in Difficult classrooms* (1997, 2006) I looked at the issue of time and made a calculation of how long it would take (in those days) for a teacher to carry out all the tasks they were being instructed to do. Since then, the list has become much longer and one teacher described it as a process of 'intensification' of role. I think this one word sums up the phenomenon I have been investigating over the years.

Since then, my writing has taken me into new areas of specialism and I have written about anger and confrontation management in and out of the classroom (Blum 2009). In this and every other piece of writing I have wanted to find effective and practical ways of increasing teacher core skills; the repertoire of things that they can actually do 'on the spot' as part of their learned automated skillset. I have always been fascinated by the idea that teachers improve their practice by building on these learned core skills that might be described as their 'signature strengths'. My daily work in schools as a teacher myself and as a teacher whilst holding various senior management roles including SENco and Deputy Head Teacher for Inclusion, has shown me that there is not time to carry out the level of planning for each and every lesson, every day, that is theoretically expected by school management. Schools are putting more and more demands on teachers to fulfil assessment, marking and administration tasks. Increasingly, in

front line class room practice, teachers have to adopt a core repertoire of skills that they feel secure with and that they have often developed somewhat haphazardly over years. These skills have become instinctive to their individual way of working, including the way they control a class, use praise, threaten punishment and find interesting ways into the lesson topic. By instinctive - I am referring to pedagogical techniques which they adopt in daily lessons without much conscious thought. They have become automated.

1.5 Continuing professional development

This research project has also come about because over the years I have been dissatisfied with the formal in service training that I have given in my various roles and participated in from others. In both circumstances the strategies that I outline or are being suggested to me, are deeply impractical, as they rely on extensive preparation time that is not available. For example, new written resources take significant time to produce. If a teacher is teaching 5 hours a day to five classes, the thirty to forty five minutes that new lesson material would take to create and then to duplicate for each class is prohibitive, in addition to the marking and thinking time that the lessons need. Even when a teacher is taking a written resource from another colleague in a department, they have to duplicate it and spend time working out how they will apply it in their classroom.

Teaching requires high levels of pedagogical expertise developed over time which has become automated, so that a teacher can adapt easily to give their lessons purpose and momentum. This is true of teaching all pupils but especially so when teachers are faced with the need to help pupils with varying kinds of Special Educational Needs. I want to find out what barriers teachers believe they face when trying to deal with pupils with learning difficulties. I believe that most teachers are aware of what they are expected to do. There is much documentation from Ofsted and the DfE on what constitutes good practice. There is also much documentation on the role of SENco. Greenfield School itself is eager to comply with Government messages in its school policies and these are reflected in my job description. It is my hypothesis that teachers do not necessarily agree with current inclusive policies, especially when pupils have significantly low reading ages, real problems with language acquisition and possibly issues around their behaviour and motivation. Teachers, I suspect, feel overwhelmed with the demands put on them to make their teaching work well for such a wide group of children but they often keep their views hidden. My research questions attempt to address these complex issues.

I used the phrase 'making sense' in my first research question, when trying to investigate how teachers had learned to live with the expectation that they could teach a variety of pupils with SEN in their mainstream classroom. 'Making sense' seemed like a sensible phrase to deal with what would be a series of practical applications to daily teaching routines that would not necessarily be fully in

accordance with what best SEN practice might recommend. I anticipated that ‘making sense’ would inevitably involve constraints and compromises for the teachers involved.

1.6 Positioning myself as a researcher

I have explained my history as a teacher and as a school manager. Both roles held by me now feel under increasing threat from what I have increasingly perceived to be an aggressive school performativity culture that does not nurture or value experienced professionals such as myself or encourage us to share our ideas and practice. This has left me feeling somewhat frustrated and isolated. My PhD research has given me a way of developing my own practice that is separate from the control of the school dictated improvement plans on teaching and learning. I have been able to think about my own practice in what is sometimes a highly personal way and the research has become an important area of independent professional life for me. As McNiff (2002) states:

‘ A useful way to think about action research is that it is a strategy to help you live in a way that you feel is a good way. It helps you live out the things you believe in, and it enables you to give good reason every step of the way. (McNiff 2002, p.5)

Surviving in the performativity culture and feeling good about myself as a professional has been a key motivation for this research. I have often felt that my professional life is becoming increasingly controlled and my expertise in special needs is increasingly overridden. So this research into my own practice has given me the chance to counter balance. To think of my own solutions to problems and challenge what seems to be the coercive banality of the external school improvement regimes.

My role as action researcher on my own professional practice made this research potentially dangerous to my position in school, if read by some people. From the very beginning of this research, I have had to think very carefully about presenting findings in a way that is ‘safe’ for me. Yet at the same the research has often been a kind of symbol of rebellion for me – an act of defiance against being told how to conduct my professional life by other so called more senior managers. It has been my way of saying, I will keep my own special place where I will decide how to improve my own work and not you. McNiff (2002) argues that action research helps a practitioner such as myself, improve their practice and keep themselves spiritually refreshed. She states:

‘ As a self-reflective practitioner you need to be aware of what drives your life and work, so you can be clear about what you are doing and why you are doing it.’ (McNiff, J. 2002 p.11)

1.7 The Research Questions

This research has three main research questions.

How do mainstream teachers make sense of their role in terms of ‘every teacher is a teacher of special needs’?

What constraints do they face? How can the SENco help?

The rest of this thesis will focus on addressing these questions. Chapters 2 to 4 provide the background to my research. Chapter 2 considers the issue of differentiation in the classroom for pupils with learning difficulties. Chapter 3 looks at the impact of the government's performativity and inclusion agendas on the practice of mainstream teachers and Chapter 4 examines the historical development of the role of the SENco in an increasingly inclusive setting. Chapter 5 discusses the selection of the research design and methodology along with a description of the actual study. Chapters 6 -10 present data from the research findings and analyse them. In the final discussion chapter 11, I attempt to draw together the key findings of the research, relate them to the existing literature and review the limitations of the research. I also suggest areas for further investigation and set out the practical implications of my findings.

Chapter Two. Differentiation and the concept of Inclusive Teaching.

2.1 Chapter Outline

In this chapter I consider various differentiated teaching styles and the research funded by the NAS/UWT teaching union into how teachers respond to the expectation that their role should be that of inclusive practitioner for all types of learning difficulty in the classroom. I present and critique academic research related to concepts of differentiation and inclusion and their practical effect in the classroom, in particular, looking at whether some teaching methods are more effective for certain categories of learning difficulty than others. I also asked the question; ‘are good teaching strategies for all pupils also effective teaching strategies for pupils with learning difficulties?’ This included a detailed examination of the research of Susan Hart and her ‘Learning without Limits’ project. The chapter also discusses research focusing on the issue of training of teachers to work with pupils with special needs.

2.2 Models of differentiation

An important issue for mainstream teachers is how to change and adapt their teaching practices to help pupils with learning difficulties learn more effectively. McNamara et al. (1997) provided a good overview of some of the key issues around differentiation. They argued that the issue of differentiation has been polarized between what they described as the progressive and traditional approaches. They suggested that to differentiate well, a teacher probably had to borrow from both traditions. In the traditional differentiation style the teacher tries to match the task to the ability of the child. In contrast, the progressive teaching style creates resources that are open ended. The teacher tries to move around the room and use one to one conversations to extend the more able and reinforce and repeat explanations of the main points for the least able. McNamara et al. (1997) emphasized that to do this properly more adults are needed in the classroom. The traditional approach would ideally divide pupils into sets or streams of different abilities but if and when further differentiation was needed, it would be managed by using different work sheets. This has drawbacks:

‘Those who prepare worksheets and different types of work for different abilities usually use text access techniques to help those with literacy difficulties. This is time consuming’ (McNamara et al., 1997, p.3).

As a summary of all the differentiated strategies available, Sharon Wyatt’s summary for classroom practitioners is very compelling. Wyatt was a national literacy strategy advisor in Southwark Local Education Authority in 2000 when she devised her simple blue print for differentiation. Wyatt (2000) divided the way that teachers can differentiate for their pupils with learning difficulties into five broad headings. First, differentiation by task, in which pupils cover the same content but at different levels

of difficulty. Practical examples of this involve the preparation of different written or oral stimulus material. Wyatt (2000) identified her second category as differentiation by outcome. In this classroom situation, tasks are often open ended for the whole class, which allows for more or less sophisticated responses as an outcome. Such differentiation needs careful pre-lesson planning so that it is genuinely open ended and accessible to all abilities. Wyatt (2000) presented differentiation by resources as the third major category of pedagogic adaptation. Some pupils are given additional resources to help them manage the lesson. This might take the form of simpler reading material, increased visual stimulus from pictures or easier written tasks. Teachers are likely to find this the most time consuming of differentiation methods as it requires production of additional materials in advance of a lesson. Wyatt's fourth group was differentiation by pace. In this situation, all pupils cover the same content but the pace or rate of learning varies. This relies on more on skilful teacher/pupil interaction at whole class level through careful questioning, although organising the class into groups for appropriate group learning can also make a difference to this teaching method. The individual groups can work at different rates with the stronger members supporting the weaker ones. Finally, differentiation by response and support, is a strategy which sees the teacher moving about the room and regularly discussing work with individual pupils one to one. They check understanding of the topic and diagnose and help with any problems that arise. The teacher's input can be to groups or to individuals. This is a practical method of adapting the lesson and requires less preparation in advance of lesson time. It is an approach that teachers feel more confident with and do more naturally than differentiating by additional resourcing that requires pre-lesson planning.

2.3 Research on teaching methods for pupils with learning difficulties

The current research planned that I should work along side mainstream teachers as they differentiated for pupils with learning difficulties. Key questions arose. What does differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties actually mean and how does it differ from modification and variation in teaching styles that might occur for any secondary aged pupils? Do different types of teaching method work with one type of learning difficulty but not with another?

Norwich et al. (2005) asked just how specialised is teaching for pupils with learning difficulties. They concluded that is very difficult to assess, as pupils that present with learning difficulties usually have what they describe as a co-occurrence of difficulties. That is to say that in practical terms a child labelled with dyspraxia may also have a low reading age. A child with language and communication difficulties may have behaviour and emotional problems. Given that these learning difficulties are fluid states and there is a lot of overlap, Norwich et al. (2005) suggested that they have been categorised for bureaucratic convenience to allow resourcing rather than because the categories actually exist in the real world as separate entities. This makes it hard to define what practical strategy should be used to differentiate for a specific learning difficulty as learning difficulties are on a continuum with each person having unique combinations.

There is also much debate as to whether specialised teaching knowledge is needed to work with pupils with learning difficulties. Are teachers expected to draw on a common battery of good teaching strategies to a varying degree of intensity or are there specific knowledge and strategies for certain learning needs? Norwich et al. (2005) suggested that at least with the categories Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) it is really useful to have specific knowledge about these conditions as it helps teachers manage pupils better. But otherwise they argue that it is necessary for teachers to use regular good teaching strategies but in a more highly intensive way, high intensity in the sense, that the teacher regularly monitors a pupil and does not rely on that pupil's self regulation of their own learning. The teacher questions and feeds back to the pupil at frequent intervals and shapes tasks with very small steps towards short term objectives. Norwich et al. (2005) also suggest that the teacher should check preparedness for the next stage of the work very carefully and provide many examples for the learning of any new concept.

This style of teaching, Norwich et al. (2005) stated is very different from the low intensity methods used with most pupils in a normal class. With low intensity teaching, few examples are given to teach a concept. The teacher can delay the individual feedback to many of these pupils as most of them can decide for themselves if they are ready to move on to the next stage of the work. The teacher need do no more than fleetingly monitor the pupils work before that next stage takes place. As each pupil needs much less teacher attention, time is created for the pupils with learning difficulties who do need the high intensity strategies described in the previous paragraph.

So the Norwich et al. model of teaching (2005) for pupils with learning difficulties is essentially pedagogy usable for all pupils, modified so that it is used at higher regularity with those with learning difficulties. This model creates problems for classroom teachers if too many pupils in their class need the high intensity style of teaching. They will not have the time to keep making the high intensity interventions unless most of the class are really comfortable managing with low intensity teacher pedagogy. In inner city schools like Greenfield, a significant minority of pupils need regular one to one time and this puts a lot of pressure on teachers' classroom time.

Reid (2005) researched the impact of teaching styles and modes of differentiation on pupils labelled as dyslexic and concurred with Norwich et al. He did not believe that there was a tried and tested pedagogy for pupils with dyslexia. They learn best when teachers employ a wide variety of common pedagogies that include multi sensory aspects. He is clear that:

‘It is futile to talk of a distinctive dyslexia pedagogy: we need to view the teaching of dyslexic children within a framework that incorporates specialised knowledge of the child together with the application of a range of teaching principles and learning approaches.’ (Reid, 2005, p.146)

Dyson et al. (2005) looked at the issue of learning difficulties from the point of view of pupils with general low levels of attainment – particularly poor language skills and weak reading and writing

skills in their teenage years. They similarly concluded that 'there is no discernible special pedagogy for children regarded as having special educational needs, but that common pedagogies may be delivered under special conditions.' (Dyson et al., 2005, p.201) They specify special conditions as including individual tuition, a more relevant alternative curriculum and intensive teaching methods. These are similar to Norwich et al. (2005) high intensity teaching methods and have the same practical drawbacks for teachers who have to practice them. A teacher in a mainstream class does not always find it easy to adapt the curricular content to make it more relevant to certain young people. They are often constricted by the exam curriculums for all pupils. One to one tuition and intensive teaching all carry time and resourcing issues for one teacher alone in the classroom with up to 30 pupils. The ethos of many schools, the way they are organised and resourced is a major barrier to the 'special conditions' for common pedagogies that Dyson et al. (2005) outline.

Research on pupils with ADHD or other forms of behaviour problems characterised as Behaviour, Emotional, Social Difficulty (BESD) implies that certain specific differentiated techniques in the classroom will help teachers

O'Brien's (2005) research showed that a highly individualistic approach is needed to alter classroom practice to deal with behavioural challenge. O'Brien (2005) interviewed experienced teachers from both mainstream and special schools. He found that teachers who had to deal with significant numbers of pupils with challenging behaviours put the emphasis on developing emotional rather than cognitive processes as the main goals of the teaching. O'Brien (2005) described this as a 'nurturant' rather than 'instructional' mode of pedagogy in that the former deals with emotional growth and the latter with curriculum knowledge. The ultimate learning objective for a 'nurturant' style lesson therefore is building better relationships rather than acquiring subject knowledge.

O'Brien identified key features of work around challenging behaviours which could be described as specific differentiation techniques. The teachers interviewed said that in order to survive the challenging behaviours in the classroom from BESD pupils, they had to discard the traditional classroom etiquette that says I am the teacher and you are the pupil and I am the giver of education and you are the receiver. Instead O'Brien described something which he termed 'co-intentionality.' This involved getting away from the traditional model of education - A upon B and instead replacing it with A in partnership to B. The personalities treat each other as co-participants. Co-intentionality depends upon negotiation of what is to be learnt and how that is done. It is the pedagogic relation of self with other and not self on other.

This specific differentiation technique that O'Brien described could be at odds with the performativity agenda in the classroom. It would be difficult for a mainstream teacher to simultaneously pursue intellectual goals for a class whilst prioritising specific emotional goals for some pupils; to enter into a co-intentional relationship with them whilst keeping a traditional teacher relationship with other

members of the class.

2.4 Research on teacher attitudes towards working in an inclusive classroom with pupils with learning difficulties

The National Association of Schoolmasters and the Union of Women Teachers (NAS UWT) commissioned a large scale report on their members in 2008 written by Professor Ellis and other leading academics from the University of Kent. The NAS/UWT was worried about the effect that the policy of Inclusion was having on the work load of their membership. The suggestion was that including pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties was having a particularly draining effect on the stress levels of their membership:

‘There is a continued tension between the needs of the one and the needs of the many within the debates on inclusion. The debate is probably nowhere more sharply focused than in the area of inclusion of children with BESD.’ (Ellis et al., 2008, p.16)

The report aimed to answer the question of the competencies a teacher needs in the classroom to integrate pupils with learning difficulties. There was an acceptance that whilst there was a variety of training experiences available, not all of them were sufficiently practical to be usable back in the classroom. The report attempted to investigate what training teachers really needed to make them feel more confident and capable in handling a whole variety of learning difficulties.

Ellis et al. (2008) reaffirmed the work of other researchers reported earlier in this chapter, suggesting that there is no distinct special needs pedagogy. Although specialist knowledge can be important, more pertinent still is developing a variety of generic teaching skills that help to achieve better outcomes for all pupils – not just pupils with learning difficulties. Training also needs to involve an opportunity for critical thinking as well as the acquisition of new knowledge:

‘The provision of training needs to be planned to build confidence as well as competence as there are important links between classroom experiences, a sense of preparedness and teacher self efficacy.’ (Ellis et al., 2008, p.15)

The review set out to undertake a comprehensive analysis of all of the literature on teachers and their views on inclusion. In particular to try and answer the question of what teachers thought they were expected to do in their classrooms and whether this was feasible or not.

Citing the earlier Ellins and Porter (2005) study of one specific secondary school, the issue of time to prepare resources which would be suitable for all pupils was raised. Todd (2001) suggested that there was also a clash between the performance/results/ league table culture for schools and the teachers’ role of promoting educational inclusion for all pupils in their classes, whatever their learning difficulties. Todd (2001) argued that it was the voice of academics, policy makers and educational researchers that was heard in relation to inclusion and not the voices of either the recipients (the pupils) or the

deliverers (the teachers) as to how well it was working. Todd also suggested that Government control over educational initiatives was so great that educational reforms were rushed through without taking true account of teacher's voices, despite the fact that the very success of implementation depends on this group even though its voice is not heard. The Ellis et al. study (2008) concludes:

‘ Given the influence of the complex interaction of personal experience, professional identity, political directives and public response on attitudes to SEN and inclusion, any attempt to impact directly on teacher attitude would appear to be fraught with difficulties. Better perhaps to work initially through teachers' experiences of SEN and inclusion and seek to improve their confidence and competence through appropriate professional development.’(Ellis et al., 2008, p. 64)

2.5 The Government's changing position on inclusion and the responsibility of teachers to teach pupils with learning difficulties

In 1997 the English government began a journey of encouraging all teachers to think themselves capable of teaching pupils with a very wide spectrum of learning capabilities with The National Curriculum Inclusion Statement (1997). Two years later more detail was added to this picture, when the National Curriculum stated that schools should make sure that their curriculum gave all pupils the chance to succeed ‘whatever their individual needs and potential barriers to learning may be.’(DFEE/QCA (1999b) and that assessment procedures in schools should give all individuals and groups of pupils the chance to show what they could do.(DFEE/QCA 1999b). (For a more detailed discussion of the history and development of Special Educational Needs policy, please see Chapter Four.)

A few years later this message was reinforced when the revised SEN Code of Practice came out. This encouraged the classroom teacher to think about how they could differentiate classroom materials to fit the needs of SEN pupils.(DFES 2001) How to go about this was made clearer and more detailed in a DFES commissioned report of good practice written by Davis and Florian in 2004. The authors' position was quite clear, what was good practice for pupils with learning difficulties was actually good practice for all pupils:

‘ The teaching approaches and strategies identified during this review were not sufficiently differentiated from those which were used to teach all children to justify a distinctive SEN pedagogy. This does not diminish the importance of special educational knowledge but highlights it as an essential component of pedagogy. In fact questions about whether there is a separate special educational pedagogy are unhelpful given the current policy context and the more important agenda is about how to develop a pedagogy which is inclusive of all learners.’(Davis and Florian, 2004, p.6)

It was clear that many researchers and academics favoured the approach that what is good for all can be good for pupils with learning difficulties. What was also clear was that the government inspectorate

Ofsted, was not happy with the speed that teachers responded to the externally imposed agenda to master these skills. The 2004 Ofsted report 'Special Educational Needs and Disability. Towards Inclusive Schools' was highly critical of the speed of change in curriculum and teaching methods. (Ofsted, 2004) The DFES responded in the same year with a guidance paper suggesting how the pace of reform could be increased. The report proposed a three tiered model of training. At the first level, all classroom teachers should acquire core skills for differentiation. A second tier in every school should include more advanced and specialist teachers capable of giving further specialist support. This would be the level at which a teacher, such as myself, the School SENco would be expected to operate effectively. Beyond that, a local authority should have a small cadre of tier three, advanced skills teachers, giving further training and advice to schools (Ofsted, 2004b).

The government's intent to make every teacher capable of responding to the needs of all pupils with learning difficulties in the class was made explicit in the revised Teaching Standards (DFE, 2012). In the section entitled 'Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils.', the message was clear:

'A teacher must have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs.' (DFE, 2012, p.7)

The paragraph goes on to say that teachers must 'be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them.' (ibid, DFE)

The teaching standards outline a clear expectation. My research has set out to evaluate how far it is possible for a SENco to support mainstream teaching staff to develop their skills with pupils with learning difficulties. What is apparent is that the level of difficulty in organising to teach a wide range of pupils with varying SEN needs has often been underestimated by various governments. They would do well to take heed of a comment made by Garner et.al. (1995) when they reported on a series of small scale research projects they conducted with learning support teachers in both mainstream and special schools:

'Teaching is an occupation which is amazingly complex. The central task itself has a hundred components.....For the teacher who has a special responsibility for supporting children with learning difficulties, the sheer complexity of managing physical and personal resources is hard to comprehend.' (Garner et al., 2005, p.23)

2.6 Effective teacher training for working with pupils with learning difficulties.

While the DFE and Ofsted have offered extensive guidance to teachers, there is little evidence that they have followed it. Avramidis et al. (2000) surveyed a group of mainstream teachers to explore their

attitudes towards including children with learning difficulties in an ordinary local authority school. They showed that teachers showed little inclination to read the official guidance on good teaching practice, or watch the video extracts that often accompanied them (Avramidis 2000). The researchers suggested that longer and more reflective practitioner training was needed to really improve teachers' skills and that it might be better if it was university based with periods for practice and evaluation. As Ellis et al. (2008) clearly stated, producing training that is not geared to the daily realities of being a teacher is unlikely to have any significant and positive effect:

‘It is imperative that those involved in providing advice, support and guidance to mainstream schools have regard for what is practical, based on an awareness of the context in which any recommended strategies and interventions will be applied. (Ellis et al., 2008, p.125)

Garner (2005) stated that the problems for mainstream teachers starts in their teacher training with very little input about pupils with learning difficulties. He argued that many students get just one lecture on the subject and an accompanying reading list. When they teach in schools in the first few years, there is very little on offer in the way of practical training.

Garner did not hide his disappointment at the inadequacy of those early years of training:

‘A typical scenario has an SEN tutor delivering (the term is highly apposite in this respect) a formal one hour input in SEN – the single occasion when students would benefit from specialist led involvement. At best it might comprise a series of anecdotes about learning difficulty that can be strung together, supported by some reading material and further references. ...Net result? NQTs with superficial knowledge, considerable prejudice and minds that are likely to remain firmly shut in the face of their struggle with the demands of an induction year.’ (Garner, 2005, p.51)

Powell and Tod (2004) stated that teachers' belief that they could be offered practical strategies by outside experts to deal with learning difficulties was misplaced. They argued that training must be a lot deeper than neat ‘off the peg’ strategies. The teacher needs to secure a mix of confidence and competence; the individual need for self-efficacy - a strong confidence that they can take a strategy and adapt it until it fits their needs, is at the heart of the successful training process. This, Powell and Tod (2004) argued requires an in-built self-belief that a set of practices are secure within the individual teacher, who has evolved their own way of making them work.

The issue of ‘self-efficacy’ in relation to inclusion needs further exploration through research in a school setting and will be a focus for this research.

As Ellis et al. (2008) highlight in their report:

‘Teachers and their schools are necessarily caught up in issues of feasibility and confidence in relation to the inclusion agenda in which they have the responsibility of teaching all children, including those

with SEN. Schools and their teachers may be asking themselves. ‘What am I expected to know and do in relation to SEN and inclusion? And ‘What can I feasibly do?’ (Ellis et al., 2008, p.156)

Ellis et al. (2008) call for more empirical data on the impact of training on the classroom experience of teachers. Responding to the challenge set out by Ellis et al., my research has set out to collect at least a small sample of such data from one large secondary school. They also point to the danger that teachers will become passive recipients of government imposed changes to their pedagogy unless they engage in their own form of practical research.(Ellis et al., 2008). My research project has given voice to myself as a SENco and shed some practical light on the daily realities of my role. In particular, my research focused on a vital part of my job description which is to see how I can support the mainstream subject teachers improve their differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties, by training them more effectively. Ellis et al. ask two questions which have been at the centre of my research project into how teachers make sense of their role as SEN teachers.

‘How effective is training offered and undertaken in improving the quality of classroom teaching and individual outcomes? To what extent are SEN pedagogies or additional or extra provision deliverable within mainstream settings?’(Ellis et al., 2008, p.162)

The 2011 NASUWT paper reported in full the practical research that had been undertaken in a case study with 100 teachers. They asked teachers about their practice with pupils with learning difficulties and the types of training they had received and would like in the future.

Key findings included teachers wanting more time to access specialist teachers in the field. The secondary teachers were also particularly concerned with feasibility issues such as how to teach and motivate pupils with learning difficulties within a wide ranging classroom group setting (Ellis et al., 2011). Few teachers were positive about the training they had received at initial teacher training stage, nor in subsequent years while in schools. More than half of those interviewed for the case studies had no idea about key elements of the government’s legislation to make mainstream classroom teachers more accountable for inclusive practice in their classrooms. They were totally unaware of benchmark terms such as ‘quality first teaching’, nor had they any idea that intervention to support pupils with learning difficulties was meant to be provided in carefully structured waves that started with the class teacher in the first wave and ended with specialist Special Needs small group intervention in the third.

However, Ellis et al. (2011) did find that teachers took more notice of aspects of their work with Special Needs pupils when they felt that they would be subjected to the external scrutiny of an inspection. The 2011 research paper started to question whether teachers spent too much time trying to comply with the external agendas of inspection rather than selecting what was best from the advice they were being offered for their daily lessons. Ellis et al. indicated that the feedback from teachers was that there were too many policy documents and that teachers often opted to ignore them all – on the basis that one piece of advice will soon be replaced by another, so it’s best to do nothing. This led Ellis et al. to question

whether the compliance culture and passive resistance to outside advice was causing a significant curtailment of teacher creativity. They questioned whether the pattern of Ofsted accountability was leading to types of teacher reaction and compliance that were undermining professionalism. They also questioned the effect of all of the external monitoring and policy on the real evaluations that teachers made of their own practice in the classroom (Ellis et al., 2011).

This is well summed up with the following observation:

‘The research findings suggest that there is not the expected timely link between the issuing of government policy and guidance for SEN through to changes in classroom practice in schools. The exception is when the changes are statutory or directly to be inspected by Ofsted. It may be that teachers are prioritising areas where they perceive there is a high level of accountability. An over emphasis on accountability could risk placing compliance above creativity and in doing so could compromise professionalism and innovation. It could be that the sheer amount of policy and guidance generally issued to schools precludes against the effective take up of specific policy and guidance for SEN and inclusion.’ (Ellis et al., 2011, p.17)

Ellis et al. (2011) concluded that teachers should be consulted far more carefully before more central government advice was issued. The research results from the sample seemed to indicate that teachers needed to have a far more active voice in the types of training and advice on offer. As the NASUWT 2011 report put it simply:

‘Teachers have an important role in improving the outcomes for pupils with SEN; it is crucial they have a voice.’ (Ellis et al., 2011, p.26)

An important focus for Ellis et al. in 2011 was the issue of how mainstream teachers felt they were managing pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties in their classrooms. This is an issue that I intend to look into as part of my own research.

Teachers reported to the 2011 University of Kent research team that they found it hard to deal with classes where a significant number of pupils were engaged in low level disruption and a small number of other pupils exhibited challenging and unpredictable behaviour (Ellis et al., 2011). Teachers reported that they were often well aware of the reasons for individual pupil behaviour and had strategies to cope with both the low level disruption and the more challenging behaviour of those notable individuals, categorised as BESD. But it was the combination of the behaviours, often occurring simultaneously, that teachers experienced as profoundly problematic (Ellis et al., 2011). This was an area of focus for my own research. Why is the issue of teaching pupils with learning difficulties so often seen in the mind of ordinary class teachers as how they respond to pupils with behavioural difficulties?

2.7 ‘The Learning without Limits project’ and its importance to research on inclusion

The research by Hart et al. 'Learning without Limits' (2004) has been one of the most influential texts in terms of the conception and construction of the current research. Hart et al. (2004) worked with nine teachers on their 'Learning Without Limits' project. Three were primary school based and six in secondary settings. Over a year they interviewed teachers about their teaching methods and watched them teach. They also spoke to the pupils about teachers' teaching styles. Hart et al. wanted to see how the participating teachers could justify teaching methods which set out to provide effective teaching to the whole class – even when that class was fully mixed ability. They wanted to get away from the notion that pupils are fixed at certain ability levels and only capable of making progress along certain trajectories that could be predicted in advance by psychometric data. In their critical review of relevant literature, Hart's team drew conclusions that differed on practice in the 1960s and 1970s than that of Michael Barber (1996), the architect of the school improvement agenda. He explained the era as one of failed child centred pedagogy and very low expectations from teachers. Hart et al. (2004) interpreted it as a period when such pedagogy was tried but had not become rooted because debates about whether classes should be 'streamed' or taught 'mixed ability' had consumed the energies of the teaching profession.

Hart et al. attacked the assessment regime of levelling of pupils from one to eight in the national curriculum. They interpret it as only allowing pupils a pre-ordained improvement from their starting point, because that initial levelling process creates fixed ability assumptions. Pupils who find themselves at a lower starting point when measured like this, Hart et al. argue, become demoralised and unmotivated. They bring low self esteem to the learning process and negative emotional energy into the classroom. This makes the teachers' task even more difficult.

Hart et al. (2004) explain the limitations of the linear approach to measuring pupils' abilities in the following way:

'The framework of levels of attainment in terms of which the National Curriculum is constructed quite deliberately echoes the idea of differences among pupils being reducible, at least within subject, to a single dimension: the relative levels pupils have reached on the curriculum ladder are quite explicitly expected to reflect their relative levels of ability. Teachers are explicitly encouraged to formulate teaching objectives and targets for particular groups in terms of where pupils are judged to be on the 'ladder' and to measure progress in terms of movement up the ladder. The assumption, underpinned by the template of ability, is that, while it is the task of teaching and learning to move everyone up the ladder as far as possible, there are reliably predictable limits on how far any particular pupil is likely to go.' (Hart et al., 2004, p.38)

Hart et al (2004) argue that the rationale of the above extract reduces teacher potential to organise their practice on richer and more empowering models of teaching and learning. Inevitably, the curriculum reduces to statutory requirements and success in league tables. This ties in well with what Yandell

(2012) outlined about the complexities of a linear style of curriculum and progression. Yandell argues that pupils learn in a complex way that involves revising and strengthening past concepts whilst simultaneously learning new ones.

For me the most useful findings from the Hart et al. (2004) were the examples of universal mind sets that they put together as a summary of the best practice they saw from the nine teachers. These are an interesting way of explaining the way that a teacher can approach differentiating for pupils with learning difficulties in an inclusive classroom. I drew on their influence as I constructed my research.

The first key mind set identified by Hart et al. (2004) was what they termed true knowledge of the pupils. The nine case study teachers made a special effort to know their classes as intimately as they could. Not just numerical data on pupil progress but the human qualities and frailties beyond that data. For example, they knew which pupils needed to be given time and space to flourish in the classroom, which pupils had the capacity to energise others and take the learning process for the whole class forward and pupils who were good at helping others so that they did not fall behind.

The authors also noticed a key mind set they termed co-agency. This refers to the teacher and the whole class being in the same team, trying to learn things together. The whole class works towards a common objective and the teacher tries to build a feeling of community rather than work at separate levels on different learning pathways with different groups of pupils. Hand in hand with the idea of teacher/class co-agency was connection. Here the teacher has to be genuinely open and accessible to be able to communicate properly to the pupils. The teacher was not purely an authority figure as most pupils needed to be able to trust that they could ask questions or get help without any danger of feeling fearful. Incorporated in this was the fact that most pupils wanted their teacher to praise them, raise their self-esteem and make them feel good about themselves in that particular subject.

Hart et al. (2004) highlight two important facets of lesson structure for pupils that emerged from the mind sets of the nine teachers. Each teacher tried in their own particular way to make lessons accessible by simplifying complex reading, writing and language. This could take many forms but the most common way was using visual/film material. The other pedagogic strategy common to all of the teachers in the study, was to make best use of pupils' prior knowledge about a subject as an entry point to the lesson.

Hart et al. (2004) also identified regular one to one contact between teacher and pupil as a vital mind set for the inclusive, differentiated lesson. Teachers who moved about the room and asked and answered questions were highly valued by pupils. Pupils were highly appreciative of the way that those teachers provide positive and constructive feedback.

Finally the issue of how teachers self evaluated their own lessons emerged as an important underpinning mindset for all nine teachers. They evaluated what went well and what needed improving in every

lesson that they taught. All nine constantly looked for ways of improving their connection with the pupils. Often the self-evaluation was conducted by putting themselves in the place of the pupils who were having the lesson taught to them. So Hart et al. (2004) often heard questions such as ‘I mustn’t do that because’ or ‘I’ll try that next lesson because.....;’

The Hart et al. findings about mind sets and inclusive teaching strategies provided an invaluable set of guidelines influencing me as SENco at Greenfield and in the research I led, to try and support my participant teachers to improve the way they differentiated for pupils with learning difficulties in their classes. As a series of mind sets that encourage certain practical strategies to be used, the Hart et al. findings provide good resources for all the pupils in a class and not just the ones with learning difficulties. I found the way that Hart et al. (2004) put the mainstream teacher and their classroom options at the heart of their research particularly persuasive.

The approach adopted by Hart et al. (2004) draws on the research methodology of key inclusion researchers such as Ainscow who looked closely at how schools could make themselves more inclusive using a collaborative problem solving approach. Ainscow (1999) examined a number of ways schools had tried to improve their inclusive practice and argued that each institution had to involve itself in a process of constant self-examination and organisational development to break down barriers to learning within itself.

Dyson and Millward (2004) highlighted the more practical daily realities of inclusion as it was implemented on the ground and this research forms an important comparison to Greenfield School in which I conducted my research a decade later. They critiqued Ainscow for not placing sufficient emphasis on the political pressures of the external performance agenda on inclusion. Dyson and Millward (2004) conducted case studies of four comprehensive schools and it was their study of Lakeside Comprehensive which resonated with me. They describe a range of practical contradictions that inhibited the principles of inclusion in a large secondary school. For example, regular setting by ability, permanent exclusions of some challenging pupils and a core of staff who were cynical about the commitment of the school’s senior management team to supporting them with difficult pupil behaviour. As Dyson and Millward (2004) state:

‘As each school’s distinctive but nonetheless apparently clear vision of inclusion encounters the daily realities of teachers, students and classrooms, something strange and troubling happens to it. It’s nebulous and ambiguous nature becomes exposed. All of this takes place within an external policy context which limits the freedom of action of managers and teachers in the schools and which demands the pursuit of goals which are, if not opposed to the original vision, at least significantly different from it.’ (Dyson and Millward 2004, p.144)

As I have already explained, I chose to use the Hart et al (2004) as a model for my own research. But other academics offer important contributions to the field of inclusion that I could have drawn on.

Scruggs and Mastropieri in particular offer a comprehensive body of research on best practice on teaching pupils with learning difficulties. Their work spans a thirty year period through numerous publications. Scruggs and Mastropieri's comprehensive study of special needs teaching (1987) stated that they tried to base all their research on the actual practices of teaching. They examined the importance of teacher effectiveness through studies of how teachers questioned and fed back to their pupils. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1987) offered practical guidance on how to plan a variety of pedagogical interventions and evaluate their success. They highlighted important issues around the teaching of reading, behaviour management and specific special needs pedagogy for subjects such as Maths, Science and Humanities.

2.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have looked at academic research on differentiation in relation to pupils with learning difficulties. I concluded that good differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties is often effective for pupils of all capabilities. However pupils with learning difficulties often need individual high intensity attention, which is time consuming for the teacher in a classroom with many other pupils.

The chapter also outlined increasing government expectations of mainstream classroom teachers to accommodate pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties effectively in their lessons. I also looked at the case study research conducted by the NAS/NUWT on how teachers are managing the issues arising from having to manage a fully inclusive classroom.

The final section of the chapter was concerned with an important piece of research conducted by Susan Hart called 'Learning without Limits'. Hart's case study research highlighted how differentiation and inclusion can be brought into a teacher's repertoire of strategies through the adaptation of mind set in the classroom.

Chapter Three. School performativity and inclusion as the context in which mainstream teachers and school SENCos work.

3.1 Chapter Outline

In this chapter I examine the government led performativity culture which now strongly influences the way schools are run and teachers work within them. I look at the work of the key architects of performance led culture such as New Labour policy maker, Michael Barber. The chapter offers a critique to the dominant culture adopting a range of different viewpoints.

I will consider the ways in which teacher performance has been linked to school accountability through league tables, Ofsted inspections and internal school monitoring of lessons.

I will place the development of the performativity agenda in its intellectual context and discuss why it was perceived to be needed in England's schools. I will examine what counter performativity authors have contributed through the critiques of writers such as Nick Davies and Amanda Coffey, the former looking at the issue from a journalistic perspective and the other drawing on social research methods to look at teachers' experiences in the classroom.

The other key central government agenda which has affected mainstream teachers in the UK is that of educational inclusion for a variety of pupils with learning difficulties. This has put further pressures on teachers to adopt a wider repertoire of skills in the classroom. The two agendas of raised performance in examinations and inclusion for pupils with an ever wider range of learning difficulties often creates conflicting demands for teachers and has created additional classroom stress. The writings of O'Brien, Hocutt and Cornwall in the collection of papers called 'Blue Skies – Dark Clouds' (2002) presents an early critique of inclusion. Rampton and Coultas (2011) also show some of the big dilemmas arising from controlling classes and varying teaching and learning styles in inner city London secondary schools. Yandell (2012) puts forward a critique of the inspection regime and the way it forces teachers

to perform in certain restrictive ways. All of these standpoints will be examined in this chapter.

3.2 A Critique of the School performativity agenda.

Chitty (2004) places the growth of performativity agenda in its historical context. He charts the growing power of right wing educational thinking with its insistence that schooling is opened to the private sector and market forces at the expense of the educational leadership of the local education authority. Chitty (2004) argues that The New Labour administration continued the theme pursued by the Conservative Thatcher and Major governments of the 1980s and 1990s emphasizing the culture of rigorous accountability of teachers for their pupils' exam results and a no excuse culture on educational failure.

Nick Davies (2000) offers an interesting critique of the performativity agenda from the standpoint of a journalist visiting a series of schools and interviewing teachers as well as shadowing them through their working day for several weeks. His book creates a picture of what it is like to work as a teacher in inner city schools under the shadow of the performativity culture. What he has observed is that the tensions and contradictions in the system are felt strongly by practitioners in schools. Many teachers would recognise his description of the difficulties in their working lives that he describes. Davies attacks what he sees as the myth and the double standards of the New Labour agenda to improve Britain's schooling system and suggests that much of the reform is false and disingenuous.

The central theme of his writing is that poverty underpins the educational weaknesses of the classroom and the difficulties that teachers face. Much of his critique of former education minister Blunkett's standards agenda in the late 1990s, still resonates in the context of teachers' work over a decade later. Davies gets to the heart of the problems that ordinary teachers have to contend with. In one chapter of his book, Davies (2000) focuses on the senior manager who is on patrol rota to deal with emergencies in and around the school. It is a rota that is often labelled 'on call'. The person in question carries a mobile phone or a walkie talkie, which is why he is referred to in this following quotation as 'bleeper man'. The presence of 'bleeper man' is as regular a feature of school life at the time of writing now as it was back in 2000 when Davies wrote his book. The quote below could describe Greenfield's atmosphere at certain points in the school day. It is an apt description for the other six inner city schools that I have worked in over the last twenty seven years as both a teacher and a manager.

'What is going on in this place? It is not that the school is in chaos. There are no riots or rapes. Indeed, there are classrooms full of children who are learning. There are charismatic teachers and some brilliant kids - charming, clever kids, sporting stars, girls taking their GCSES two and three years ahead of schedule. But then there is this fragility, this constant bubbling of trouble threatening to erupt as if the teachers were pulling off a miracle every time they reached the end of a lesson without an explosion. As the Bleeper Man picks his way through the school, juggling crises, the outline of the truth begins to

emerge.' (Davies, 2000, p.6)

Davies goes on to analyse the pupil interactions with 'bleeper patrol'. The kind of crises and emergencies the patroller has to deal with :

'The children who are caught up by the Bleeper Patrol have more stories than Hollywood, but almost all of them have one thing in common. They are poor. And that is what matters. It is a simple thing. Every teacher knows it. There was a time when every government minister admitted it. The banal reality is that the single factor which more than any other determines a school's performance is its intake - the children who go there.'(Davies, 2000, p.7)

Davies goes on to outline the features of that poverty as emotional damage, exposure to poor housing and the drugs culture. He argues that there is an environment on many estates where social boundaries are collapsing. He concludes that a school which is based in a disadvantaged community will struggle with its children; one that is based in a more affluent area will prosper (Davies 2000).

He also draws attention to the way that teachers have to work building productive relationships in the school working with 'children who are so tough on the streets that policemen won't go into their estates without back up and flak jackets; yet a lone teacher in shirtsleeves deals with them thirty at a time' (Davies, 2000, p.14).

This is a context that teachers in inner city schools recognise. It is the context that many believe they work in every day. It is a context which I am fully in tune with, having worked for 28 years as a teacher in it.

3.2.1 The blame culture.

A central argument for Davies (2000) is that key government interventions over the last 15 years have proposed that schools can be blamed for the failure of the children they serve. Yet he argues, millions of pounds have been poured into projects which do not address the deep seated issues facing schools in inner urban areas. The central premise of the school performativity agenda has been that too many teachers have failed their pupils and have allowed poverty and social context to be used as an excuse for why attainment is low. But Davies argues that the socio-economic issues are all pervading issues and have always had a huge influence on educational results. To ignore or disregard these real issues is to ensure that no honest appraisal of the education system is ever made and therefore no real improvements to it either.

'This is the secret that everyone knows: the children of poor families are far less likely to do well in school than those whose parents are affluent. For the last ten years, this has been almost buried in

denial. 'Poverty is no excuse,' according to the Department for Education. Nevertheless, it is the key. As every one knows.' (Davies, 2000, p.16)

Davies argues that the school effectiveness trail is a false path. It offers political capital for politicians as it removes the blame from them and puts it on schools and teachers.

'By pinpointing the work of teachers and administrators, it completely absolved central government of all possible responsibility for failure. By sidelining the impact of intake, it permitted policies which focused on detail in the school and were therefore relatively cheap, and which promised to deliver quick results and were therefore electorally attractive. And so the Department for Education and Ofsted were already committed to hunting down failing schools and attributing their failure entirely to the weaknesses of teachers and managers, ignoring the destructive impact of an intake which had become progressively more delinquent as the new poverty swept through the country. ' (Davies, 2000, p.20)

Davies (2000) describes the much vaunted rise in standards in exams nationally as 'a confidence trick'. He argues that the culture of raising standards puts teachers under real pressure and distorts the way that they teach.

'Welcome to the other side of David Blunkett's drive for higher standards, to the world of tests and targets, where the career prospects of a teacher or the future of a whole school can be wrecked by one bad set of statistics, a world where teachers have been taught failure with such intensity that they have learned to cut corners to survive. Welcome to the Big Cheat.' (Davies, 2000, p.150)

Davies (2000) argues that there is room for teachers and schools to improve but that they alone cannot manage the scale of the change that is demanded. But government does not accept that poverty and quality of intake is a key to outcomes and results. Their mantra is that poverty is no excuse. So schools have to try and do better in the tests whatever their circumstances.

Davies quotes a teacher on the various methods that are used to do this.

'We all know the system is ridiculous but we don't do anything about it. It's just a game we play. Or to be precise, a collection of games. ' (Davies, 2000, p.152)

The teacher sources that Davies interviewed, describe the various deceptions that are carried out. The deceptions include altering data on attendance to make a school's attendance better than is the daily reality. Various strategies are used to do this such as marking part time pupils as full time or registering the whole school as one hundred percent present on a day when snow has caused school closure. Schools also enhance behaviour data by keeping statistics on poor behaviour artificially low by excluding pupils internally rather than officially and externally. They also ask behaviourally challenging pupils to leave voluntarily rather than be excluded permanently. They send pupils home unofficially rather than describing this as an exclusion. These strategies make a school's behaviour

appear better than it really is and can be used to justify a story that a school is transformed for the better.

Davies describes what happens regularly in schools, validated by my own experiences and those of other teachers. Davies's work provided a realistic contextual background for the current research at Greenfield School.

Yandell (2012) attacks the inspection regime as simplistic and bad for good quality teaching. Like Davies, he critiques the pressures that inspectors put on teachers to produce particular narrow minded 'teach to the test' types of pedagogy. Yandell suggests that the Ofsted model of teaching is flawed, with its proposition that learning is the product of teaching, that it is to say, an output produced by definite, pre-specified and discernible input. Ipso facto, in Ofsted terms, an outstanding input should lead to an outstanding output. Good teaching should lead to good learning. Yandell outlines the weaknesses in this argument:

'Teachers have a responsibility to plan for learning and to intervene in the learning process, to introduce learners to new concepts, new experiences, new ways of seeing themselves, each other and the world. But learning is unpredictable, messy and polymorphous, it is contested, mysterious and often elusive.' (Yandell, 2012, p.6)

Yandell (2012) believes that teachers feel restricted and disempowered by the Ofsted model of linear progress. But they know that they have to work in a world dominated by the school improvement agenda and that their own careers depend on being seen as successful within it. So, Yandell argues, they will alter their practice to try and give the inspectors what they think they want to see. Yandell argues that teachers have already abandoned more diverse pedagogies than they previously adopted to give both inspectors and also school senior management teams what they consider to be successful practice. Yandell's (2012) observations seem to find verification in the fact that secondary school senior management teams now run mini-inspections of their own departments through a series of lesson observations that use Ofsted terminology.

Coffey (2001) looks at the structure of teachers' working lives from the perspective of how changes in educational policy have affected them. She describes the policy changes of the 1980s and 1990s as characterised by increasing surveillance of teachers through the inspection system:

'Policy and educational reform led to a simultaneous diffusion and concentration of power. Parents were given enhanced choice and schools were given more decision making and managerial responsibilities, while, at the same time, what was taught and how it was taught and how it was assessed became increasingly centralised.' (Coffey, 2001, p.2)

Coffey (2001) charts the rise of the inspection system and the way that schools had to conform to its criteria. She explains its impact and the proliferation of school documents, policies, systems and

procedures for Ofsted to monitor. The classroom became the centre of activity for a style of teaching that had to be seen to raise exam results every year. Ofsted (1996) made it clear that teachers who did not raise standards each year should be branded as failures and could be removed.

Coffey outlines an evolving situation in which auditing and measuring in education had very deep effects on school cultures and the teachers that worked in them. If a school was labelled as 'failing', then the school could be closed and the teachers lose their jobs. Coffey (2001) describes a compliance culture during inspections, where teachers put on an artificial display for their official visitors. They create documentation for lesson planning that they would not normally have time to prepare, let alone use. Webb et al. provide an interesting case study of a deputy head in a primary school undergoing an inspection. She prepared lesson plans to a level which she would not have done on a normal day. However the process confused her and spoilt the natural flow of her teaching (Webb et al. 1998).

Yet Coffey (2001) is quite clear – teachers have to be actively engaged with this kind of preparation for Ofsted even if they would never teach in this manner for the rest of the year:

‘ This highlights the ways in which teachers simultaneously distance and engage themselves in the school inspection process, maintaining the self and the everyday reality of the classroom whilst satisfying corporate pressures and demonstrating high levels of commitment to work.’ (Coffey,2001, p.15)

Ball (1997) conducted a case study of a school which Ofsted had described as 'good'. He found that the headteacher had adopted all of the new management discourses about quality. But the teachers themselves complained that their work load had intensified with too many record keeping and administrative tasks that were not directly related to teaching. There was a feeling that the new tiers of paperwork were creating an artificial representation of the school. Ball's analysis of what teachers were saying led him to question what the words 'good' and 'bad' really mean in terms of an inspection. Clearly, what Ofsted valued in this institution was different to the way that teachers rated the quality of their own work. Exploring this divergence was an important theme in my research.

3.2.2 Teacher resilience to the surveillance culture

Coffey (2001) charts the rise of what she terms the 'surveillance' of teaching as a profession. This is highlighted by the prescription of the curriculum, performance related pay which is designed to reward good teachers and pressure to remove teachers who are considered to be poor. This culture has had a substantial impact on the lives of teachers. But despite these changes to the culture, Coffey points to certain key continuities of the profession that are hard to change:

‘Teachers are still front-line providers of education; classrooms still need to be managed and organised, lessons planned, students engaged, encouraged and controlled. ‘(Coffey,. 2001, p.87)

She goes on to explain that the essence of teaching remains social interaction and communication and the surveillance culture cannot take those key functions of the job away:

‘Teaching remains concerned with social processes and social interaction. The articulation of relationships between teachers and learners is still central to the process, function and ‘success’ of education systems. ‘(Coffey, 2001, p.88)

So although educational policy can impinge on teachers’ lives, there are certain universals of classroom work that will be very similar to those of past eras of teaching and will remain so into the future. Some of these every day realities of teaching are continually addressed ineffectively from the outside by policy makers. Certain inconvenient truths about what it is like to work in the classrooms of inner city secondary schools are fastidiously ignored by external policy makers. Some of these themes are explored further in my research.

Fenwick (1998) also considers what is really important and what is marginal in the life of an active classroom teacher. Fenwick argues that the world of the classroom has a vibrancy and immediacy that keeps it at the centre of the minds of teachers. The unpredictability of what can happen tends to push the policy documents and performance indicators of the external world aside. While teachers are in the classroom, they are fully committed to the immediate interaction with the class:

‘A group of adolescents in a classroom appear at times to be a bubbly cauldron of physical energy, the fidgety restlessness and raw unpredictable spurts of mood and behaviour that wriggle in complex dynamics underneath the tidy classroom structures. Teachers must interact with this energy within the relatively small confines of the classroom.’ (Fenwick,1998, p.624)

Thus Fenwick (1998) argues that the world of the teacher is still to a significant degree a private and an isolated world. Those two features give teachers considerable personal autonomy. However, Coffey suggests that while Fenwick is right to point out that autonomy is still a strong feature of a teacher’s working day, the surveillance culture has made significant inroads into it.

Fenwick (1998) also suggests that teachers deal with the immediacy, energy and unpredictability of the classroom by trying to develop very predictable routines. This means that bold experiments with pedagogy are feared by most classroom professionals. Versatility and trying new things require high levels of energy. Many practising teachers are already stretched by the daily routines they use to control their classes (Fenwick 1998). This makes them inhibited about changing routines and teaching methods that they know have helped them calm their classrooms up to now. Fenwick’s research poses interesting problems for the training and continued professional development of teachers. Managers, such as the SENco, need to challenge some of those routines and get mainstream practitioners to

think about how to diversify and vary their classroom practices to support the learning of those with SEN. This has been a key theme in this research. For me, the issue has been, what should I be doing as the lead special needs professional in the school, to support teachers in taking risks and adding new activities to their regular repertoire of skills.

3.3 Non- deferential learning. Initiate, Respond and Evaluate (IRE) and its effects in the classroom.

Rampton et al. (2011) shed some light on why teachers find it so hard to change their teaching styles in inner city secondary classrooms. They help explain the context of 'bubbling' and 'unpredictable exuberance' that Fenwick (1998) outlined.

Rampton et al. (2011) propose that the most frequently used pedagogy in secondary school classrooms is what they term Initiate, Respond and Evaluate. The teacher initiates (I), the pupil responds (R) and the teacher evaluates (E) that pupil's response. Rampton et al. (2011) state that in some urban classrooms, the IRE model does not work smoothly. They undertook a series of studies of classrooms in inner London with thirteen to fifteen year olds. The school where they carried out the research was given the name of Central High.

The findings clearly identified numerous instances when the teacher was interrupted by pupil comment, especially from groups of boys, with the result that the IRE model was put under serious strain.

Rampton et al (2011) conclude that:

'It would be an exaggeration to say that traditional IRE relations had collapsed and that teachers and pupils now had an equal role determining the course of each lesson. Even so, these deviations from the traditional structure were more than just temporary blips in instructional interaction - on the contrary, some of them helped to carry the lesson forward, and they usually went unreprised. ' (Rampton et al., 2011, p.6)

However many of these interruptions spoilt lesson flow and led to off task behaviour. Some pupils in the class, particularly girls, were put off making contributions to the lesson for fear of interruption from others.

The conclusions that I drew from the Rampton research (2011) on classroom interactions was that many of the interruptions had an impact on the lesson momentum. Such disruptions make the teacher tired and less likely to take risks in experimenting with new teaching methods. Yet Central High and my own school Greenfield, (as well as my previous schools) have had similar classroom atmospheres.

Rampton (2011) repeatedly used the phrase 'lack of deference' to describe the pupils' attitude to the teacher. Some pupils were actively disengaged for significant parts of the lesson but others had shorter bursts of interrupting the teacher and refusing to wait their turn. My interest from a research perspective

is how far the exuberance, interruption and lack of deference that Rampton describes, 'un-relax' the teacher and make it difficult to differentiate their classroom practice. An ability to relax with pupils is a key issue that plays to the heart of everything in the classroom. Looking at this issue was an important part of my research.

In an earlier study (Rampton 2006) Rampton played 4 minute recordings of pupil and teacher interaction to 39 secondary school teachers. Although they often commented critically on the way that staff were handling situations, they revealed other interesting information about how they handled their own classroom experiences over their careers. Common themes that emerged were the constant need for the teacher to be performing in a very energetic manner, otherwise lessons quickly became very difficult. In addition, teachers needed to engage in a lot of negotiation and compromise with pupils about what the lesson etiquette should be, rather than rely on assumed teacher authority. Other teachers reported that their lessons had to entertain and immediately grab the interest of the pupils or some would lose interest with ruinous consequences for the rest of the class.

Rampton's analysis concludes with a realistic note about the need for dialogue between government and teachers about what the problems of teaching in inner city secondary classrooms really are. School improvers such as Michael Barber, whose ideas are examined in the next section of this chapter did not always take account of them:

'Most crucially: if you do not have a realistic account of the ways in which teachers and pupils actually manage to get by in their everyday lives, pedagogic interventions are bound to flounder. At present, public debate and official policy treat contemporary urban classrooms as nothing more than the chaotic outcome of incompetent pedagogy, or describe them with euphemisms like 'challenging', and there is no space for teachers to reflect on their work with anything other than feelings of failure and shame.' (Rampton, 2011, p.20)

Rampton believes that it is important to recognise these difficulties in a constructive way and credit those who have enhanced achievement with pupils in difficult conditions. Otherwise no kind of educational reform to improve the classroom can be effective:

'Open and intelligent discussion turned to the realities of the urban working environment' (Rampton, 2011, p.20) are key to what is needed. My research has been undertaken in this context.

Coultas (2012) takes up the theme of just how difficult secondary teachers in inner city settings find it to change their classroom practice. Her particular research interest is why teachers do not vary their pedagogy with more oral work in their classes, Her conclusions are similar to Rampton's. Teachers are battling to manage behaviour and keep IRE functioning in sometimes restless classrooms. They want to manage IRE effectively before they can risk doing anything else (Coultas, 2012).

Coultas goes on to suggest practical ways in which teachers can improve small group work with talk despite the obvious difficulties that there can be. Her interest in what teachers have to say about using talk has important parallels with my research on how far teachers are capable of differentiating for pupils with learning difficulties. Talk methods are a key strategy for helping pupils with low literacy levels and other forms of communication difficulties. Coultas's findings are therefore relevant to my research.

Coultas (2012) states that many researchers have pointed to the benefits to be had from the collaborative use of language in the classroom yet her research in schools shows that many teachers remain wary and hesitant about embracing talk for learning. This is partly due to school cultures. Coultas (2012) believes that teachers as a peer group judge other teachers favourably if they are able to get a class reading or writing quietly. This is seen as a badge of honour. The ability to get silence in a classroom is vital for teachers and so they are critically concerned about controlling behaviour. Coultas (2012) believes this is borne out in how many behaviour management books are sold directly to teachers themselves, a professional group who buy virtually no other books on education.

Coultas's case studies (2012) showed that teachers can be afraid of trying group talk which is not teacher dominated. Group oral work is noisy and is hard to monitor. She states that other teachers and many of the pupils do not believe that it is real work. Both groups want the familiar pattern of IRE and control being exerted by the teacher.

Like Rampton, Coultas concludes that teachers in inner city schools have a particularly challenging time in getting their classes to listen to them. Far more difficult than if they were working in suburban schools with a different socio-economic intake of children:

'Here we begin to see the fears and practical concerns of teachers intersect more directly with research. There is some acknowledgment that, for example, these teachers, working in urban schools in mixed ability classes with a high proportion of pupils from disadvantaged communities, face distinct problems in entering into a dialogue with their students. This contrasts with the situation in Suburban West Park, where there is a more socially advantaged school population, and IRE continues to dominate ' (Coultas, 2012, p.188).

3.4 The case for School Performativity

The majority of teachers I have worked with in the last ten years, have had major reservations about the performativity agenda. However, it is important to outline why it was introduced and what it hopes to achieve. Rightly or wrongly, it has become an important part of teachers' lives and has to be considered critically.

The rationale for the school performance agenda was set out initially by the architect of its philosophy, Michael Barber in his 1996 book- 'The Learning Game.' What Barber wrote, largely came to fruition as educational policy in the 1997 to 2010 New Labour government years and has left a strong mark on the classroom ethos of today's teachers. Appointed head of the new Standards and Effectiveness Unit in the Department for Education and Employment, the day after Tony Blair won his first election under the memorable slogan of 'Education, Education and Education', many would consider Michael Barber to be the key New Labour architect on education policy. For instance, Blair wrote about the Learning Game:

'Michael Barber is one of the most stimulating thinkers in British education today. Above all, Michael Barber speaks with a passion for the educational opportunities of all Britain's children. We need more people like him and more books like this one.'

Barber's educational treatise was written with the Millennium in mind and the need to think about a new century and the challenges and possibilities it could bring to Britain's schools. Barber's agenda (1996) can be summarised in the following way; teachers have often not been rigorous enough in the classroom and have been too ready to make excuses for the low performance of pupils. Although he is always careful to describe such teachers as a minority, the regime that he subsequently created was aimed at the whole of the teaching profession. The following lines summarise his position on just how weak willed some teachers had become:

'A minority have responded by patronising such young people. These poor youngsters, the line runs, are so hard done by that we will make exceptions for them when the coursework deadlines arrive, we will step over boundaries of professional advice and give them direct help with exam work. Where we can, we mark up, not down. Thus beguiled by well meaning but naive and transparently unprofessional teachers, these youngsters arrive in work, further education or the social security system with a deadly combination of poor skills, low self-esteem and a confused notion of what success learning really means. In short they have been betrayed.' (Barber, 1996, p.27)

Brett Wigdortz who is the Chief Executive Officer of the Teach First scheme in the UK is another powerful exponent of performativity. Teach First is a new type of training for young teachers that puts so called high achieving graduates straight into the classrooms of schools with socially disadvantaged pupils.

Wigdortz (2012) claimed to have devised the concept of new high calibre British graduates coming into London inner city schools to inject fresh ideas and previously unknown high levels of commitment. He reported a 'moment of enlightenment' when he visited Burlington Danes School in West London:

'I had never been to a British school before. The stench of apathy hung over the entire building – no smiles, no inspiration, no structure. In one class the teacher stood in front of 30 teenagers virtually

reading from a script about the Second World War while his audience chatted.'

This teacher spoke to Wigdortz after the lesson and said to him - ' We want to keep them out of trouble – if they leave here without any problems and we keep them off the street, then we've done our job. You can't expect too much from these kids '.

Wigdortz (2012) was so appalled by his visit, that he went on to create an organisation which he argues has turned schools like this one around and transformed them. The young graduates who increasingly staff them, Wigdortz describes, as dedicated high calibre professionals who after six weeks training over their summer holidays, between university and the school term, show an incredible fortitude and resolve not exhibited by the existing staff. According to Wigdortz (2012) the current Burlington Danes' head teacher describes these young people as 'a shining example' to others because they refuse to accept failure and cling to the belief that all the children can succeed. This impacts on all the staff and changes the ethos of the school. According to Wigdortz (2012) when he re-visited the school, the only arguments going on in the classroom were pupils in a heated debate about the use of allegory in Dickens' novels.

The setting up of an organisation like Teach First has reinforced the culture of school performativity in inner city schools and created a new cadre of teachers entering the profession, immersed in a value system that rejects the achievements of past generations of teachers. This educational doctrine has put most teachers under high levels of stress. Not only the older more experienced teachers, but also younger staff, some only recently graduated from Teach First themselves. The performativity agenda says that they should be transforming pupils' life chances but the reality of the classroom is that they need to adopt pedagogy of a practical nature both to survive and to improve their teaching.

3.5 Performativity and the inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties

The culture of performativity that encourages teachers to follow government directives causes real problems for teachers who are trying to respond to the inclusion agenda.

Many researchers argue that teachers can only really improve their pedagogic practice if they share experiences with fellow classroom professionals rather than read good practice manuals on inclusion from government officials. Key research on inclusion has concluded that practitioners must be able to adopt a teaching mind set that encourages the involvement of all the pupils in the lesson. . It is from this all embracing mind set that practical strategies to improve teaching actually evolve. Ainscow (2000) sums up how this needs to work in a school:

' The creation of a problem solving culture including learning how to use one another's experiences and resources in order to devise better ways of overcoming barriers to learning.'(Ainscow, 2000, p.78)

It is a position that O'Brien (2005) develops. O'Brien argues that teachers need to go outside their comfort zone to meet the needs of pupils with a variety of learning difficulties in their classrooms. This kind of change to pedagogic practice O'Brien suggests is only possible when leadership comes from inside the profession and not from forced 'performativity' dictates from outside. O'Brien speculates that teachers are put off experimenting with pedagogy because the government are constantly telling them what to do and how to do it. Hocutt's research (1996) picks up on resourcing issues as limitation on Inclusion. In Chapter Two I showed that Norwich et al. (2005) and Dyson et al. (2005) identified the need for high intensity teaching methods for including pupils with learning difficulties effectively. Hocutt's studies (1996) in the USA showed that when such high intensity programmes were employed they required considerable investment of money, time and training for teachers.

The inclusion debate, like that of performativity, is linked with considerable political rhetoric. Cornwall (2002) like O'Brien, believes that government planners would have a much greater success rate in changing the practice of teachers if they tried to create an atmosphere in which teachers felt genuinely supported by the outside world. Instead he points out that they feel that their practice is being continually challenged. This makes them anxious. Cornwall (2002) suggests that without support and encouragement the desired changes to practice will never occur.

Cornwall takes his critique of the barriers to changing teachers' practice to somewhat controversial conclusions. He believes that Ofsted inspections should be stopped and teachers should be given the power to be autonomous professionals and decide for themselves what they teach and how they teach it. Like Coffey (2001), he is no doubt that teachers often waste their already limited time trying to conform to the outside agendas of inspection when the time would be better spent on increased professional dialogue with each other. This is theme that I explored in my research.

3.6 Chapter Summary.

In this Chapter I have looked at the rationale for the performativity drive in schools emanating from authors such as Barber and Wigdottz. I have also presented the case against the performativity culture as outlined by Coffey, Davies and Yandell.

I have also considered the issues that have developed for teachers relating to educational inclusion for pupils with all types of learning difficulties.

Chapter Four . Literature Review Part Three. The Special Needs context.

The history and development of Government policy and legislation.

4.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter will consider the notion of inclusive practice and how it has developed by charting the historical development of education through a medical to a more social constructed model of special needs. I also examine the development of the role of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENco) in the English secondary school system and what research has highlighted about the tensions within that evolving role.

4.2 Historical background to special needs provision.

It is important to understand the development of special educational needs provision in the context in which this research is based. England has an educational system which has gradually evolved over the last thirty five years towards the situation where mainstream teachers find themselves directly responsible for the education of children with a very wide range of learning difficulties.

In the 1960s and 1970s, this was not the expectation. A medical model was prevalent then. Pupils with learning difficulties were diagnosed as having a disability and were educated away from the majority of their peers in specialist schools. They were given labels such as ‘maladjusted’, ‘delicate’ and ‘educationally sub-normal’. These terms were adjusted in the early 1970s to sound less derogatory and schools categorised pupils using terms like mild or severe learning difficulties.

In 1978, Baroness Mary Warnock published a landmark report which challenged the medical model of learning difficulty. Underpinning Warnock’s recommendations for change was a social model of special needs. Young people with learning difficulties should expect the society around them to change and adapt to meet their needs rather than be segregated and treated differently until such time as they were ‘normal’ enough to be allowed into the mainstream. Changing society meant altering the way that young people were schooled. Warnock (1978) widened the category of pupils with learning difficulties so that it included twenty percent of the school population. Her report suggested that this one fifth of total school intake would benefit by full integration in mainstream schools. It was only in this way that both their educational and social needs would be met. It became the duty of mainstream teachers and the curriculum to adapt to ensure that this was effective.

From that time, legislation designed to change the way that pupils with learning difficulties was steadily introduced. This social model of integration and adaptation is fully expected from today’s British mainstream teachers. A pupil may still carry an educational psychologist’s diagnosis of Dyspraxia or Autistic spectrum but teachers are expected to adapt their teaching to take account of it. Pupils with such diagnoses are now part of mainstream education to be socially integrated and not medically segregated.

The key developments to come directly from the Warnock Report (1978) were new structures to cater for pupils with SEN in the mainstream - such as the 1994 Special Needs Code of Practice and its major revision in 2001. The original 1994 Code created a five stage plan for pupils with SEN that took them from initial identification as having learning difficulties by their class teacher to a stage five, where external assessment by an educational psychologist working for a local education authority, led to a 'statement' being issued. This statement was a written declaration of what a child's learning difficulties were and a recommended series of extra teaching and learning was established, funded with extra money for the school, so that they could employ or buy in additional specialist staffing. In 2001, the Code of Practice was substantially revised and rewritten. The stages for identification of SEN was streamlined from five stages to three – school action, school action plus and statementing. At the first stage, the pupil with learning difficulties was to be given extra help from careful differentiation by the mainstream classroom teacher. At the second stage, school action plus involved external assessment and intervention from specialist services such as speech therapy, behaviour intervention teams and the educational psychology service. The third stage was statementing and the attachment to the pupil of additional funding as with the earlier Code of Practice. The 2001 revised code made it mandatory for pupils within the school to have a co-ordinator called a Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENco). That lead professional was charged with adapting a whole school approach to supporting teachers in developing their skills in teaching pupils with learning difficulties.

At the same time as the structure for supporting pupils with learning difficulties was strengthened in school through the creation of the statementing process and the SENco role, education policy was changing towards favouring the policy of educational inclusion. Inclusion in itself was not just a policy aimed at pupils with learning difficulties but at all groups of disadvantaged and perhaps previously neglected pupils in the school system such as pupils with physical disabilities, young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds or those in social care. In reinforcing the right of every child to have access to the curriculum that was suitable for them, the issue of appropriate pedagogy and teaching resources for pupils with a variety of learning difficulties was at the forefront.

A plethora of guidance and legislation relating to inclusion emerged from the late 1990s until the present day. It is beyond the scope of this literature review to examine all of it. But a few key examples set the scene for the position teachers currently find themselves with regard to teaching standards (2012) that clearly place the responsibility for teaching all pupils, including those with learning difficulties on their shoulders.

The first key educational Special Needs provision of the New Labour government 'Excellence for All Children' in 1997 was an important milestone setting the scene for the New Labour years of education reform around inclusion and learning difficulties. Excellence for All Children (DfES 1997) made it clear that a social rather than the medical model of education for children with learning difficulties was to be developed further. The Green Paper stated that most special needs children would have their

educational needs better met in the mainstream. Special schools were to become the province of highly specialist education for a very small group of pupils with highly significant learning difficulties. The paper also stated that the system of identification of learning difficulty was to be focused on the early years with interventions directed at pre-school education that involved parents. The approach was to be multi-agency and involve social work, health and educational professionals. David Blunkett, the new education secretary, himself subject to the disability of blindness and special needs that came as a result of it, was determined to link the teaching of pupils with learning difficulties to an attack on low teaching standards in the classroom. From this moment onwards teachers in the mainstream have been held accountable for their ability to cater for those pupils with learning difficulties.

Blunkett made this quite clear in his introduction to Excellence for All Children (1997).

‘Good provision for SEN does not mean a sympathetic acceptance of low achievement. It means a tough minded determination to show that children with SEN are capable of excellence. Where schools respond in this way, teachers sharpen their ability to set high standards for all pupils. (DfES, 1997 p.4)

The issue of SEN and general disability became more thematically linked at the turn of the century. The rights and entitlements of young people with learning difficulties became integrated into a wider definition of young people who had to live with a variety of mental and physical disabilities; disabilities that society had not adapted or catered for sufficiently. A second milestone in the development of the rights of pupils with learning difficulties to be educated effectively in the mainstream came with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) in 2001.

In SENDA the visions and aspirations of the 1997 Education Reform Act were given legal reinforcement through the concept of disability rights. A pupil with SEN had the legal right to be offered the same educational opportunities as all other pupils in a school. In practical terms, this meant that it was legally necessary to make adjustments to the way that pupils could access classrooms on the upper floors of a school building or be able to attend a school trip. Hand in hand with these explicit practical issues, was the underlying implication that a child with learning difficulties had the right to a fully accessible curriculum and effective teaching experience. SEN pupils were linked to the wider issue of disability and became one of the key groups in the fight against social disadvantage, through the policies of educational inclusion.

In 2003, the Green Paper ‘Every Child Matters’ was published. This examined the whole issue of social and economic disadvantage. Young people with learning difficulties were felt to be over represented in this group and this further helped highlight their needs. Every Child matters (ECM) set out the concept of a universal entitlement for all young people through five life indicators; their right be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution to society and achieve economic well being (DfES, 2003). Explicit groups of young people identified by Government as a special concern

included pregnant teenage girls, young people not in education or employment and vulnerable learners such as those with learning difficulties.

The underlying critique of teachers that they were not teaching to a high enough standard for SEN pupils was first proposed back in 1997 by the education secretary David Blunkett and New Labour (DFES 2007). This is continued through Coalition politician Sarah Teather in the 2011 Green paper on special needs – ‘Support and Aspiration. A new approach to special educational needs and disability.’ Schools are encouraged to concentrate on what is described as better quality classroom teaching to reduce the number of pupils categorised as having learning difficulties..

At the time of writing, it is impossible to estimate how the policies suggested in this consultative paper will affect practice in schools and classrooms in the medium term. What is different this time is the context of severe recession in the UK, which puts more pressures on educational budgets than in the years that followed ‘Excellence for All’ in 1997. The structure of mainstream education is also changing dramatically. Secondary and primary mainstream schools, many of them in inner urban areas are opting out of Local Authority control and becoming academies. Such academies are increasingly run by large privatised companies such as Harris, E Act or the United Learning Trust. They have policies relating to mainstream inclusion and differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties .

Local Authority funding is being reduced. The training of teachers, the assessing of pupils with SEN and the provision of certain specialist services such as Speech and Language or Autistic Spectrum advice are likely to become increasingly the province of private sector companies.

The direction of these forthcoming changes is hinted at in the 2011 ‘Support and Aspiration’ paper mentioned earlier. Pathway local authorities (DfES, 2011) were selected to experiment with a single Health and Care plan ,which is likely to replace the funding and assessment arrangements around the SEN statement, the bedrock of the system since the 1994 SEN Code of Practice. The Health and Care plan is meant to provide for a child from birth to young adulthood at the age of 25. Learning difficulties will become one part of the overall responsibility of multiple agency initial planning including health, education and social services. It is no longer the sole responsibility of a SEN department in a Local Authority. A further element of ‘market choice’ is envisaged as parents of children with learning difficulties will be issued with a personal budget to select services they explicitly want for their children. Theoretically, they will be able to remove funding from one provider and bestow it on another.

The pressure on teachers needing to provide high quality teaching for pupils with learning difficulties remains the same. Issues of accountability and raising standards for the more vulnerable pupils are restated in new ways. The Ofsted review of SEN (2010) was still largely negative about the way mainstream teachers were differentiating for pupils with learning difficulties. The report highlighted what it considered to be the over identification of pupils with special needs, pupils, who simply needed

better mainstream teaching , rather than being put on the Special Needs register and being categorised as having a learning difficulty.

Consequently, the 2011 Government Green paper ‘Support and Aspiration’ has directed schools to abolish two stages of assessment and support for SEN pupils by removing school action and school action plus and have one SEN school category with much reduced numbers of pupils with learning difficulties identified on it. Instead schools should focus on what is termed ‘quality first teaching’. (DfES, 2011)

The role of SENco in this formulation, my role at Greenfield, to co-ordinate the provision of SEN pupils has been increased. In 1994 SENco was made a mandatory role in schools. From 2011 it will be mandatory for any new SENcos to have comprehensive training and acquire a specific SENco qualification.

To conclude this section, it would seem that the issues around incorporating pupils with learning difficulties into the mainstream have remained much the same over the last 15 years. New Labour introduced a significantly fresh policy direction which aspired to inclusion. This was supported with legislation that challenged discrimination on the basis of disability or membership of a socially or educationally disadvantaged group in society. In reality, practical implementation to support these policies has been more difficult. The practicalities of giving teachers the skills and the working environment that they need to differentiate for a wide range of pupils has proved hard to implement. The Coalition Government is still trying to make significant headway with a problem that was exercising the minds of policy makers back in 1997. Maybe, including SEN results in performance league tables and stating that pedagogy for SEN pupils is part of the revised 2012 teachers’ standards criteria will achieve a breakthrough. But it is likely that the aspirations set out in many policy documents over the years will not be fully implemented unless closer examination of what actually happens in school classrooms is undertaken. My current research aims to add to the body of knowledge on this subject.

4.3 The emerging role of SENco in the English Educational system.

The National Union of Teachers (2005) has been one of the key teacher organisations to research into the pressures of the SENco’s role . Through the writing of what they call the SENco charter, they have recommended that the SENco be given adequate non-contact time, administrative support and very comprehensive training to carry out the complex operational and strategic role that they are expected to perform. The research has also identified the key task of supporting mainstream teachers with differentiation.

‘SENcos need to co-ordinate whole school strategies for building the capacity of their schools to include learners effectively and draw class and subject teachers actively into planning for pupils .’(NUT

,2005 p.2)

The SENco Charter from the NUT is in no doubt that:

‘The position of the SENco is demanding. It involves obtaining resources, managing the work of learning support assistants, advising and supporting fellow teachers, liaising with statutory bodies and voluntary agencies and with parents and contributing to the in-service training of other staff. Many SENcos complain of overload.’(NUT, 2005, p.5)

Petersen (2011) charted the changes to the role of the SENco from that of a specialist teacher of pupils with learning difficulties in the early 1990s to a more complex role of administering the Code of Practice whilst still acting as the sole teacher for those with learning difficulties in the late 1990s. Petersen (2011) showed how this role expanded as the legislation on inclusion became more comprehensive and evolved into a much more strategic ‘whole school’ approach. The SENco was increasingly asked to advise, train and work alongside teachers in classrooms. They were to skill the mainstream practitioners into being SEN teachers, rather than teach all of the pupils with significant learning difficulties themselves in withdrawal groups. As Petersen pointed out, the policy of the inclusion transformed the composition of the mainstream classroom and there were significantly more pupils with complex SEN than there had been twenty years before. Petersen placed great significance on the recent SENco training qualification as a key strategy to raise the capacity of that professional role in the school and welcomed the fact that it had become mandatory for all new SENcos from 2009.

Oldham and Radford (2011) interviewed ten secondary SENcos about how they viewed their role in school. They worked on the premise that the kind of evolution that Petersen charted, had changed the emphasis of the role from that described as ‘co-ordinator’ a term which they categorised as a more junior role in a school hierarchy, to that of strategic leader for SEN, a position which they ascribed more senior status to. Oldham and Radford stated that expecting the SENco to be a strategic leader was demanding, when he or she still performed a time consuming daily operational role. They suggested that school leadership in SEN should consider one of two pathways for future development. The first would make it statutory for all SENcos to be part of the senior management team of their schools. The alternative would make their role less strategic and return them to the role of an operational manager for the additional programmes of pupils with SEN. This would return the role to that of the mid 1990s outlined earlier in this section. Instead Oldham and Radford (2011) suggested that it should be the head teacher who would train to become the skilled strategic leader for SEN. This would be hard to implement in a large and complex secondary school. Head teachers would find it difficult to make the time to engage in the specialist knowledge required to champion SEN.

There have been other significant research projects into the role of the SENco since the mid -90s . Much of the research has explored the contradictions and tensions in the role. Kern's research

(2005) identified five key roles a SENco might adopt in schools and combine to make sense of their work. Kearns classified the SENco as the expert on SEN and the rescuer of those pupils, whose learning difficulties see them failing at school. But he also depicted the SENco as 'arbiter' between pupils with learning difficulties and other members of staff who find them challenging and difficult to cater for. Kearns (2005) also defined the SENco in the role of 'auditor', who has to keep up with paper work to service the Special Needs Code of Practice. Finally, the SENco was also the 'collaborator', working alongside mainstream staff who are trying to teach pupils with learning difficulties effectively. Kearns (2005) argued that to be a truly effective SENco, all roles need to be played simultaneously by one person but that this seldom happens, due to a variety of institutional constraints. In earlier research, Lipsky (1980) analysed what form those constraints took. He found that SENcos had to work out for themselves how best to handle those multiple roles in their own school's culture. Lipsky (1980) concluded that SENcos were 'street level bureaucrats' who had to create some kind of order in their working lives.

The tensions in the multiple roles expected of the SENco were analysed more closely by Cole in her 2005 paper describing the role of SENco as 'Mission Impossible'. Cole reviewed the findings of a Sheffield study on 59 SENcos. Cole (2005) found that the SENcos reported feeling swamped by paper work and bureaucracy around the statementing process. They also found their role managing ever larger teams of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) very time consuming. The SENcos perceived that their job description had expanded but only 17 percent of the sample felt that they were senior enough to carry out the role effectively. 66 percent of those interviewed worried about whether the teaching staff they worked alongside had the appropriate skills to do their jobs with pupils with learning difficulties effectively.

Although Cole's sample was relatively small, her conclusions resonated with me as I began my research seven years later. Cole (2005) asked herself a crucial question in her survey of SENcos. She wondered how their daily duties restricted their ability to adopt strategic approaches to whole school SEN issues. She highlighted their lack of time to help teachers improve their differentiation in the classroom.

Sarah Rosen Webb's research (2011) entitled 'Nobody tells you how to be a SENco' was also illuminative. Rosen Webb, like me, was a secondary school SENco. She researched eight secondary SENcos and conducted a series of semi structured interviews to find out about the pressures and realities of their working life.

Rosen Webb used the participant's narratives alongside her own reflections to explore the day to day reality of what it was like to do the job of a secondary SENco. Like earlier researchers Cole (2005) and Kearns (2005), she found that there was much tension and ambiguity in the various roles that the group of professionals were asked to play. Lack of time, lack of status and burdensome bureaucracy were all important limitations to the daily work of the SENco and caused them significant stress. Like Lipsky

(1980) before her, she concluded that SENcos forged their own re-worked version of a job description, according to their own personal strengths and interests.

An important part of my research project is to examine the expectations placed upon me in the role of SENco. I have attached my job description as appendix 1 . It is an example of how the role can be structured in one school. It shows that on my appointment, I was expected to have experience of supporting staff to improve and develop their classroom practice as well as lead in the development of curriculum materials to support students with learning difficulties. So my ambition to support mainstream teachers in developing their roles in differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties – a key object of my research question – is written into my job description. But so are many other expectations in that document that compete for one person's time at work. Key parts of my stipulated duties require that I ensure all the legal and statutory obligations for students with special needs are met. In practice, this means implementing the lengthy administrative procedures of the Special Needs Code of Practice for the forty statemented pupils at Greenfield. I am also expected to monitor the quality of teaching as well as the academic outcomes of all special needs pupils in the school. There are inherent tensions in mixing these two roles. Administrative tasks take time away from giving 'the strategic lead for high quality SEN provision' (my job description).

4.4 Chapter Summary.

In this chapter I have provided an outline of the SEN legislation and policy that has changed provision for pupils with learning difficulties. Since the 1980s, the educational placements of such pupils have become increasingly in mainstream schools with all teachers expected to have the training and skills to meet their needs in the classroom. I have also shown how the role of the SENco in schools has developed over the same period with ever greater expectations that the person who holds this position can work in a senior strategic position within their institution. I have highlighted what researchers have described as the underlying tensions and conflicts in this evolving SENco role and set out the role in my school as an example of this.

Chapter 5 Methodology

5.1 Introduction.

In this chapter I will explain the approach to research that I adopted and also the rationale for the choices I made. I will outline what I actually did and link my model of research to existing research techniques. I will try discuss how reliable my research methods have been and how ethical issues such as confidentiality and anonymity have been treated. The research questions below remain at the heart of the research design. The design took into account my current employment setting as teacher/SENco in an inner city school with limited time and resources available to me as a sole researcher.

How do mainstream teachers make sense of their role in terms of ‘every teacher is a teacher of special needs’?

What constraints do they face? How can the SENco help?

5.2 Rationale for research methodology.

To begin to address the research questions, I set about considering the research methods that I would use. My premise was that through undertaking a study of my own practice as a SENco in one secondary school, I would be able to describe issues and events which would have resonance with other practitioners in a similar position. So my research fits into an interpretative rather than a positivist paradigm. I cannot demonstrate through the analysis of my work in just one school, a ‘generalisable’ set of observations that would apply to all secondary school SENcos and the work that they undertake with their mainstream teachers, but I can provide a ‘case study’ of one particular SENco’s life in a school that many others will be able to empathise with. My study may highlight situations and themes which strike a chord and resonate with other practitioners – despite the fact that my particular case study is unique to its context.

In terms of epistemology, I could only research the world of Greenfield School using my own perceptions. I interpreted what I found by describing the qualitative data that came from the interviews and various forms of participant data. I relied on analyzing my own critical incident journal for self-reflections and I tried to remain aware of both the strengths and weaknesses of the research traditions that I was drawing on. Later on in this chapter, I will consider the challenges case study research can present. I will also examine issues related to aspects of life history interviews. My research also drew on techniques that are often closely associated with ethnography so I will examine some of the controversies highlighted in such methodological approaches as far as my own study is concerned.

My research drew on a mixed methods approach. Morse and Nichaus (2009) might have summarised it as research which is primarily a qualitative study but which started with a quantitative base. My initial questionnaire to the teaching staff of Greenfield School set the scene for the research questions. I gained insight into some of the key issues through the statistical analysis of the questionnaire data. The quantitative questionnaire highlighted important themes for further investigation through the

qualitative interviews that followed. The interviews, along with the partnership teaching and a self reflexive journal were all used to explore in more depth findings derived from the questionnaire. Teddlie and Tashakorri (2009) described the way that quantitative and qualitative data together can broaden the researcher's horizons and help deepen their investigation of phenomenon:

‘We believe that each form of data is useful for both verification and generation of theory....In many instances both forms of data are necessary...both used as supplements, as mutual verification and most importantly for us, as different forms of data on the same subject, which when compared , will each generate theory.’ (Teddlie and Tashakorri. (2009, p.16)

My mixed method design fitted the description of what they described as a sequential mixed design. I began with quantitative data analysis derived from the questionnaire and followed through with my qualitative interviews and analysis to verify and expand on those findings. The varying sources of data analysis adopted were designed to make the research stronger and introduced a significant degree of triangulation to the recurring themes. As Morse and Nickaus (2009) state, some questions are best answered by using more than one way of collecting and analysing information.

‘To grasp complex phenomenon, research often demands that more than one research method be used in the same project.’ (Morse and Nickaus, 2009, p.13)

I followed a commonly used mixed method model procedure suggested by Morse and Nickaus (2009) in that I started with a macro study and then followed on with a micro study. I investigated using a questionnaire on the attitudes and behaviours of the whole of the teaching staff at Greenfield school and followed through with a micro approach by interviewing and partnership teaching with a much smaller group of individual teachers.

Miller (1995) makes a strong case for PhD students beginning their research by placing themselves at the starting point of their own study. She argues that telling their own story about how and why they became interested in their research questions became a very effective way into their projects. Looking at my own personal narrative in education and at the reasons I became interested in evaluating my role as SENco and my work with mainstream teachers, is at the heart of the methodology of this PhD. My story as a teacher, is integral to the action research case study I am undertaking within my own community and work place, Greenfield school. My methodology relies on me telling my own story through a journal of critical incidents, field notes on partnership teaching and through semi-structured interviews in which I shared many ideas with my participants.

5.2.2 Ethnography

The research methodology that I have developed is reliant on important principles of ethnographic

practice. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) outline, I am the researcher participating in a community and immersing myself in people's daily lives for an extended period of time and 'watching what happens, listening to what is said, and asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues and the emerging focus of inquiry.' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3)

Parts of my research took some of the participants in the community out of their daily context to talk to me in semi structured interviews. But the partnership teaching and the field notes that I drew from as well as the diary of critical incidents from the SENco's role fitted in closely with the immersion principle outlined above.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) explain the essence of ethnography as exploratory, in that it investigates the lives of people and how they view the situations they face. This was at the core of my research or as Hammersley and Atkinson say 'how the people involved see and talk about their own actions and those of others, the context in which the action takes place and what follows on from it.' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.7)

5.2.3 Auto-ethnography

My research drew on the specific traditions of auto-ethnography. I was researching my own role in my own community. Ellis and Bochner (2000) provide an illuminative explanation of the role a person can play in their own research. They show that the researcher can be very much a part of 'the story'. This formed an important part of my research as I wanted to look at how teachers and their life decisions about going into teaching also affected the way that they approached the job of differentiating in classes for special needs pupils. I was also part of my own research as the SENco who was charged with getting teachers to improve their practice in this regard.

In an article by Carolyn Ellis as the narrator and Art Bochner her partner on the nature of narrative research and their student, Sylvia (2000), there is a running dialogue between the two researchers, Through this dialogue, they explore what Sylvia can do with her own story when wanting to do research on how women cope with breast cancer. One of Sylvia's biggest battles as a breast cancer patient was how to get her voice heard and how to get her message across. Sylvia played the role that I want to play in my own research. Sylvia wanted to speak for the many women who do not get listened to in the breast cancer treatment debate, even though many of them are the victims of the illness. I wanted to be the voice that unlocked the voice of teachers, who also are not often included when key issues are researched in the classroom. They are frequently told by external experts what they should do, and how they will be judged, with little reference to their experiences and concerns.

5.2.4 Advocacy ethnography

I found the writing of Smyth and McInerney (2013) persuasive in what they termed ‘advocacy ethnography’. They define this as an approach to ethnography that is inclusive of the lives, perspectives, experiences and view points of the least powerful. I would place England’s secondary school teachers into a group that lacks power. Some would argue that they are highly educated and well paid middle class professionals, who command both respect and authority in our society but I believe that closer analysis of their actual work place situation shows that they are a voiceless group in terms of the educational debate. They require a form of ‘advocacy ethnography’ because in the words of Smyth and McInerney they are a ‘group in society whose interests, voices, and perspectives are silenced, excluded, marginalized, expunged or totally denied’ (Smyth and McInerney 2013).

I wanted my research methodology to give the teachers I work with and myself as a teacher amongst them, what Smyth and McInerney term a human face and a living voice. There is an inevitable bias in the way that I will present that voice but I do not think that this invalidates my research, providing that I am aware of it and declare it. I believe I am a writer commentator on education and a teacher who is describing the dilemmas that teachers face. My observations are biased but they are still useful for shedding light on complex problems. Smyth and McInerney describe a moral dimension to research which has resonance with my methodological approach:

‘Maintaining a disinterested stance when confronted with injustices is not an option, nor is it sufficient to fall back on the principle that research should do no harm to participants. It must do more than this. To take a stand for those most adversely affected by unfair practices and discriminating policies, is to recognise that research has a moral dimension.’ (Smyth and McInerney, 2013, p.15)

This provides a strong argument that research methodology can take an approach that highlights the voice of an oppressed group in an overall fight for social justice. I am in a position to ‘bear witness’ (ibid 2013, p.15) to what is happening in the lives of teachers in the classroom. It is a research approach that provides accounts of teachers’ working lives and my own working life, that helps reinforce our integrity as a professional group and reaffirms our sense of agency.

My research approach has also drawn on the influence of Whitehead and McNiff (2006). Like Smyth and McInerney (2013) they argue that the voice of the participating practitioner needs to be heard for the sake of democracy and justice (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). The process of action research that they outline is in a constant state of flux. The practitioner researcher changes their theories as their own life changes. Theory needs constant re-visiting as the both work place and the person in it changes – hence the concept of action research being a living theory that never stands still but is always in the making.

5.2.5 Case studies

As I explained earlier, the case study approach is at the heart of my research methods. I am undertaking a typical case study in that it observes the characteristics of an individual unit – in this case the unit of a

school, in which I work as both SENco and teacher. Cohen and Manion (1994) make the point that the study of one unit can provide useful information to the larger community of which that unit is a part.

I am drawn to case study because I believe it offers me some very strong opportunities to present important new research findings. As Cohen and Manion highlight, a case study set in my own school is 'strong in reality' (Cohen and Manion 1994, p.123) and 'this strength in reality is because case studies are down to earth and attention holding, in harmony with the reader's own experience, and thus provide a 'natural basis' for generalization' (ibid p.123).

My case study will also rely on action research techniques.

5.2.6 Action research

I was attracted to action research because of the nature of the research questions I have set for myself and the environment I have selected to ask the questions. I have been drawn to the writing of Lawrence Stenhouse, who was a champion for teachers researching into their own practice in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. (Ruddock et al.,1985)

Stenhouse's work encouraged teachers from all over the United Kingdom to set up mini research projects around their own work in the classroom. He championed the importance of the teacher's voice being heard. He believed that they should challenge the wisdom and perceived knowledge handed down by the hierarchy and the so called voices of authority.

Stenhouse's approach to research resonated with me because of the value and the integrity he places on one person trying to make sense of their own work place and their own practice in daily professional life.

My action research took place in my own work place, Greenfield School. The school itself became the centre of my case study. Mckiernan (1991) sums up the key features of action research in a work place situation and the way it can be used to exemplify practice. He reminds us that it is undertaken by practitioners so they can work out ways of doing their jobs more effectively. As Mckiernan points out, 'theories are not validated independent of practice and then applied to the curriculum; rather they are validated through practice.' (Mckiernan, 1991, p.4)

As suggested by Mckiernan (1991), I have become a participant in my own research, experiencing problems directly and trying and search for solutions. The intervention I have devised as a researcher may only be small scale but the fact that it takes place in the real world means that it might offer an opportunity to others to learn from it and apply it to their own circumstances.

I was drawn to the practical model of action research that Mckiernan (1991) suggests as it is appropriate to a small case study. A problem is identified by a practitioner such as myself, the SENco, working in a school. For me, the question was what should I be doing to fulfil the part of my job description that

says I should be giving guidance and support to mainstream teachers working with special needs pupils. Action research includes undertaking some form of exploratory research and finding ways of defining the problems more fully. My methodology has addressed this with an initial teacher survey followed up with semi structured in-depth interviews with six teachers. According to Mckiernan, the very act of carrying out that exploratory research helps to deepen the understanding of the problem. This was certainly the case as I conducted the questionnaire element of the research and followed that up with interviews.

Mckiernan (1991) identifies another key feature of action research methodology as attempting to tell a story about what is going on and how events fit together. This is done by reporting the narrative in terms of the perceptions and beliefs of those involved in the research setting. I drew directly on this through my interviews, my follow up partnership work with some of the classroom teachers and my own journal notes on how I perceived working relationships within Greenfield School to operate. I have let that story tell itself using the every day language of my participants and not highly technical research language – another key feature identified by Mckiernan (1991) as being at the centre of the action research tradition.

Mckiernan believes that action research is validated by the unconstrained dialogue of the participants and the free flow of information to all the participants. I prepared typed transcripts of the in depth interviews that I conducted and showed them to the participants so that they could see that I had reported accurately on the probing questions I had asked them. But there were ethical issues over the free flow of all information to participants in others aspects of my data collection. Some of the conclusions I drew about partnership teaching were difficult if not impossible to share with my partners. Some could be shared but other conclusions could have upset and de-stabilised the partnership relationship although they needed to be included in the research findings because of the wider implications they have for the setting in which teachers work. This is considered in more detail in later sections of this methodology in relation to ethics.

My research approach has also drawn on the influence of Whitehead and McNiff (2006). Like Smyth and McInerney (2013) they argue that the voice of the participating practitioner needs to be heard for the sake of democracy and justice (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). The process of action research that they outline is in a constant state of flux. The practitioner researcher changes their theories as their own life changes. Theory needs constant re-visiting as the both work place and the person in it changes – hence the concept of action research being a living theory that never stands still but is always in the making.

5.3 The research methodology

I have described the influences of ethnography, case study and action research on the rationale for the

methodology I created.

My actual methodology can be divided into the following elements:

1. Questionnaires for all of the teachers in the school.
2. Interviews with six teachers.
3. Partnership teaching with five teachers.
4. Diary/critical incident journal/field notes .

5.4 The case study school

Greenfield School is the fictitious name given to my current work place. It is a secondary school in an inner city catchment area of the UK. It has one thousand pupils and a teaching staff of approximately eighty. It recruits from a multi ethnic community which speaks over one hundred languages. There are several hundred pupils on the special needs register at school action. A further 40 pupils have SEN statements. The pupil with the most complex statement has full time support funding while the smallest of support allocation is for the equivalent of 10 hours of teaching assistant time each week. The Learning Support Department at Greenfield has one specialist teacher in addition to the SENco, a teacher running a behaviour/nurture group for pupils with significant behavioural and emotional statements and 20 other learning support assistants. The SENco line manages all of these staff. Greenwood was inspected in 2013 and judged to be good overall and outstanding in terms of its leadership at all levels. The inspection report is enclosed as appendix 4 to give the reader a fuller picture of the school.

Greenfield has mixed ability groupings for all subjects at Key Stage Three, except for Maths in which the pupils are setted by ability. At Key Stage Four Science joins Maths in setting the pupils. The option choices at the end of Key Stage Three allow the pupils some element of subject choice but compel them to follow colour coded pathways. Blue is the academic route and yellow is the broadly vocational qualification route. The former includes triple science and a humanities and language GCSE in keeping with the current government's gold standard baccalaureate type qualification. The latter still contains some BTEC qualifications in subjects such as Travel and Tourism and Health and Social Care.

Sixty percent of the pupils enter the school with a reading age of between seven and nine when they have a chronological age of eleven. The school puts in a number of literacy interventions to help the weakest of these in form of one to one reading recovery and small group literacy catch up. Greenfield has an active and vibrant community life. The pupils are supported with good extra curriculum clubs

and a very supportive anti bullying programme, staffed by trained pupil mentors. For a further information on how Greenfield was seen by the outside world, the appendix 4 Ofsted report provides useful detail.

5.5 Research design

The first step I undertook in my research was quantitative. I collected questionnaire data from all of the teaching staff at Greenfield school. Sixty seven out of 72 teaching staff responded.

After analyzing key themes from the questionnaire using both quantitative and qualitative techniques, I followed these up in a more in depth way by asking six mainstream teachers to allow me to interview them.

Based on what was said to me during the interviews, also drawing on data analysed from the initial larger scale teacher survey, I decided to work in direct partnership with the mainstream teachers who I had interviewed in their classrooms. I kept detailed notes of how the partnership teaching developed and my thoughts about how the relationship between myself as SENco and the classroom teachers was changing. At the same time, I kept a detailed journal of critical themes and incidents from the rest of my working life as the SENco of Greenfield School.

5.5.1 The questionnaire

Piloting the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of a series of questions about how comfortable staff were with the expectation that ‘every teacher is a teacher of special needs.’ I developed questions about the quality of their school in service training and initial teacher training in special needs. The questionnaire was based on my own personal experience of what I believed the key issues were for teachers working with SEN pupils in the classroom. I asked teachers to comment on a range of differentiation strategies that I had drawn from a combination of practical lists that I had seen in the past on various training courses. I offered them a series of choices about ways in which they could receive further training on SEN and asked them to rank their preferences. The next section of the questionnaire asked them to assess their capabilities in terms of key strategies for in-class differentiation. The survey also asked them to rank order the obstacles that prevented them from improvising differentiation in the classroom. A copy of the questionnaire itself is included in Appendix 2.

To compose the questions for my survey, I piloted the questionnaire with a group of seven student and first year teachers. Examination of how the questionnaire was completed and feedback from these teachers enabled me to refine the questions further before I presented the questionnaire to the whole of the Greenfield teaching staff. As a result of the pilot, I reduced the number of questions, removing many of the open ended questions that required a personal response. In the section that asked teachers to

suggest the frequency with which they used key differentiation strategies, I also changed the options from 'regular or occasional' to 'never, rarely, occasional, often or always' as I felt that this would give more information for the analysis.

I wanted to administer the questionnaire either at a staff meeting or a teacher training day, when I knew that most of the questionnaires would be returned immediately. I was able to use a twenty minute slot on an INSET day for questionnaire completion and subsequently had a very high return rate. I collected the questionnaires as the teachers left the room. Full details of the sample are provided in Chapter 6.

There were issues of anonymity and confidentiality related to the completion of the questionnaire. Some of the questions were about potentially controversial teaching issues and it is possible that some teachers felt inhibited answering in a large public forum, in which the head teacher and their senior managers were also completing questionnaires. I tried to guard against people feeling intimidated into giving 'politically correct' answers by stressing that they did not need to fill in their names. I also stressed that all of the results from the questionnaires would be anonymous and it was important for them to be honest in their responses. I made it clear that my research project was not part of the internal school improvement agenda being run by the head teacher and his leadership team. I provided these assurances with a five minute verbal presentation introducing my research to the whole staff just before I asked them to fill the questionnaire in.

5.5.2 The interviews

I conducted six interviews which were semi structured. I had a core of questions that I asked everybody but supplementary questions were added if an interesting direction for questioning and information consolidation presented itself.

I was interested to explore some of the personal motivations of my participants and their guiding philosophical and pedagogical principles in the classroom. The questions I constructed, probed their own experience of schooling and what they had taken forward from that experience into their own teaching. I asked them to tell me how comfortable they felt with the notion that every mainstream teacher is a teacher of special needs. I asked them to tell me when they felt they had handled a critical incident relating to a SEN pupil well in a classroom and what they had learnt from it. Each interviewee was asked about the quality of the training they had had to teach SEN children up to that moment and the kind of training that they thought they would value in the future. The interview asked about the practical limitations that their daily ways of working put on their ability to work more effectively with pupils with learning difficulties. The detailed interview questions are supplied as appendix 3. The interviews themselves were recorded on a digital dictaphone and transcribed fully.

I showed the participants the interview transcripts to ensure that they were content with the way I had transcribed them. The interviews with six staff had their own power relationship issues. I was the

SENco and they were subject teachers. They knew that I had a role to monitor the quality of SEN provision in the classroom and that their pedagogic style was a part of that process. I also had significant professional relationships with some of the participants that were in place before I interviewed them for my research. They knew my views on issues like school performativity and might have been tempted to say things to me that they felt I would be happy to hear. Also as I worked alongside teachers, many formal and informal conversations inevitably took place. Both parties began to relax as various challenges in the classroom presented themselves, but the background role of the SENco to monitor and judge the teaching capacities of others in relation to SEN still presented itself. There was also the possible perception from mainstream staff that as the SENco, I had an easier life than other staff because in that role you have fewer timetabled classes. As I worked with teachers, I had to try and disentangle what they really thought of the SENco role in schools. This involved trying to find out what they really knew about the work that I did. My research methodology helped me to explore how SENcos are perceived in their own school communities.

The staff who agreed to let me interview them made a considerable commitment to my research. They opened themselves up to some searching questions about their practice. They agreed after the in-depth interview, to let me undertake a period of advisory/partnership teaching with them. I recognised that the staff who signed up for this were both brave and resilient practitioners. They were prepared to put their own professionalism under scrutiny and open themselves up to the idea of taking on new and potentially unfamiliar skills. Working with me for a period of time would expose their strengths and weaknesses. However, the same would also apply to me. As the SENco, I would be exposed showing my weaknesses as well as strengths. My sacred mantle as SEN expert in the school was seriously at risk. Both parties had much to gain but there was also much to lose.

The sample of teachers I interviewed and then worked with were selected in a semi- voluntary fashion. I did not put out a general invitation to the staff and recruit volunteers in that fashion. I approached teachers whom I thought would open to consider working alongside me on their practice. I approached them individually. Some refused the invitation saying that they were too busy in the forthcoming academic year. Others were suspicious of my research questions and I could see that they were slightly anxious that my official role of SENco may have led me to 'judge' them in some way, possibly reporting my impressions of their teaching back to senior management in the school. My 'volunteers' were teachers who accepted that they would do an interview and then as part of that commitment to the research would have a period of in-class partnership support. Two additional teachers, who were on my timetable to give in-class support were recruited as part of my normal cycle of work. I was able over time, to persuade them to become involved in the research. For them, this meant that I started with the in-class support partnership but then went on to the semi structured one-to-one interviews.

I deliberately tried to include a range of teachers in the school in my research. Some male, some female; some young teachers, some much older and with a great deal more experience. I also aimed to have at least one person in the senior hierarchy of the school from the leadership team, although I failed in this objective. The male teachers were both quite experienced in that they had between five and ten years teaching experience and had some key middle leadership responsibilities. The female teachers had the same profile of experience. Two were middle leaders and one had held a cross curricular responsibility but had given it up because of out of school family commitments. These were members of staff who had had plenty of time to consider their pedagogy in relation to teaching pupils with learning difficulties. Full details of the sample are provided in Chapter Seven.

5.5.3 Partnership teaching

In terms of the partnership teaching, I made detailed field notes of my thoughts and reflections about my interaction with the partnership teacher. I kept field notes that included a running commentary on critical incidents that had taken place in each lesson or presented themselves over a period of time.

There was also the important question of how long I would be working with staff in the partnership teaching mode. I felt that a minimum of a term and a maximum of one year was appropriate. As the SENco, there are always pressures to move on to another teacher in the school and spread my expertise and support more widely but there was the counterbalancing issue that the partnership work needed to last long enough for trust to be built and effective routines to develop. With some teachers and the classes that they taught that would be quicker than others, so I had to be flexible about how long I was prepared to work with each teacher.

5.5.4 Diary - Critical incident journal.

At the same time as my partnership work in the classroom with the teachers who had participated in the in depth interviews, I kept a diary of important events in my life as SENco in the school. The diary is perhaps better described as a journal of critical incidents in the daily life of a secondary school SENco in a big inner city school. The journal described the other work activities I was involved in, whilst at the same time trying to carry out the partnership teaching that was part of my research. The journal documented the other elements of the SENco's job description. A copy of my job description can be found as Appendix 1.

Tripp (1993) argues strongly for the critical incident journal as a reflective tool. He states that it is a highly effective way of picking up on emerging themes and honing one's response to them. As Tripp (1993) points out, early items and themes in a journal are not necessarily the ones that are developed

over time. He argues that the medium of a journal allows us to change the way we think about problems as we actually write. With time and reflection, when looking back at a journal, the critical incidents that we wrote about at the time may no longer be the ones that we label as 'critical' now. Other themes have developed during the writing and have become dominant.

Equally, Tripp illustrates that what were thought of as revelatory moments at the time of writing can end up being far less significant after the lapse of time. The critical incident journal helped me keep a watching brief of my own feelings, values and assumptions. As I wrote, I started making connections between the incidents and their importance to the research I was conducting. I tried to remain aware that what I was selecting as a critical incident and the way I had chosen to analyse it was going to be highly subjective.

5.6 Reliability of the research model.

Schofield (1993) questions what is needed to make a research process reliable. He speculates as to whether the process must be replicable in so far as another researcher could ask the same research questions and come out with a similar set of results. He concludes that it is very hard to replicate any qualitative study in all its constituent parts. This observation clearly applies to this research. It is essentially a study of one institution and one teacher's place in that institution making it a 'unique' study. However the findings may resonate with other teachers who work in similar secondary schools. My case study is not wide ranging enough for me to make claims that the results I obtain are 'generalisable' to other schools, but it may strike a chord with other SENcos and mainstream teachers. Stake (1985) sums up the essence of the strength of a small scale case study.

'It observes naturalistically and interprets higher order interrelations within observed data. Results are generalisable in that the information given allows readers to decide whether the case is similar to theirs.' (Stake, 1985, p.277)

I hope to demonstrate reliability similar to that which Dee (2002) describes when researching the decision making processes of pupils with SEN who transfer from school to college at sixteen. Dee's (2002) basis for reliability is described as centering on what is true to real life in a very particular context – the one of her study. That study can never be repeated exactly but it provides a layer of unique thick description, which could not be replicated but is still authentic and hugely informative. What does it mean to follow through Dee's research premise that being true to real life in a particular context is all that matters? The very phrase 'true to real life' is dependent on the moral value systems that the researcher adopts. Greenbank (2003) argues that it is vital for the researcher to be self critical of their own value systems as a guard against becoming biased. He calls this 'being reflexive'. For example, if we apply the Greenbank test to my own research, then I need to be conscious of my own value system and the fact that I dislike the external hand of government on the daily pedagogic practices of teachers. I also need to be aware that my intense dislike of the school improvement agenda as

being derogatory to teachers' professionalism will inevitably colour my judgments. Holding such strong opinions may also lead me into an over simplification and possibly over glorifying of what teachers can do by themselves 'on the ground' through their own research and improvement to practice. If this is my strong bias, then I need to guard against it in the way I design my research methodology and the conclusions I reach from my data. Perhaps even, as Greenbank (2003) suggests, I should seek to minimise bias in my work by actively looking for evidence that runs counter to my social value system.

5.7 Validity of research data.

I tried to make the validity of my data stronger by using multiple sources, which involved very different collection methods including the initial whole school questionnaire, the interviews and the resultant partnership practice field notes and my diary/journal. The varying data collections provide a way of triangulating the information.

The basis of my research is in the qualitative interpretative paradigm. The validity of my research comes from what Lincoln and Guba (1985) prefer to describe with the word credible. To be credible, they argue, the findings have got to be transferable in that a similar study could be carried out in another context and yield the same pattern of findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also state that validity in qualitative research is established by the use of 'thick description', a term used by Dee (2002) in the explanation of what made the findings of her research meaningful. Lincoln and Guba believe that when the description of the context and research setting become sufficiently detailed - the findings are given a strong feel of trustworthiness and authenticity.

5.8 Ethical issues in this research

I followed the BERA ethical guidelines. All the teachers consented to participate. The interviewees were told that they could stop the interview whenever they wanted or withdraw information that I had written that they did not feel comfortable with. I obtained written consent from each teacher to use the transcript for the research but also for training purposes in the future. This included the use of the voice transcript sound recordings both at Greenfield and in other schools in years to come.

There were significant ethical dilemmas related to my research. What if I found that somebody was involved in appalling classroom practice that should be disclosed to their line manager or maybe the child protection officer or the head teacher? Should I disclose it or should I remain faithful to the bond of trust between me and my research participant? I judged each and every situation on an individual basis. Greenbank (2003) states: 'I submit the real issue is not whether researchers attempt to be value neutral or not. What is important is that they adopt a reflexive approach that is clearly articulated in their writing.... Whilst I accept that value neutrality is an unrealisable ideal, I nevertheless have sympathy with the notion of at least attempting to be value neutral by trying to bracket values, by adopting a grounded approach, using rigorous methods such as triangulation and feeding back results to research

participants.’ (Greenbank, 2003, p.798)

This was the approach that I adopted. However, I had an ethical dilemma over communicating the findings to research participants. I was able to share some data to participants such as the transcripts from the interviews. Ellis and Bochner (2000) warn that one of the dangers of the researcher involved in an ethnographic type approach which uses field notes, is that their loyalty to the reader, in this case the wider academic and teaching community, becomes more important than the bond of trust they have worked on with the research participant. This was a key issue for me. There were times when I wanted to make a point to my readership about issues in partnership teaching, which could have been seen by my partner as a betrayal of trust. To resolve this, I have weighed up each situation and on some occasions left the information out of the findings out of loyalty to the teaching partner. But other times, I have prioritised the readers’ need to know over concerns about the partner.

There are also ethical issues around the funding of my research. I have received eighty percent of funding for my PhD from two organizations, Greenfield School itself and the National Association of Special Educational Needs. The funding has been negotiated on a year by year basis. I have felt pressure to provide both organizations with research of a positive practical nature for improving the ways classroom teachers differentiate for pupils with learning difficulties. I have tried to guard against distorting what I found and presenting it only in a positive light, if the actual results are open to more wide ranging interpretation. I have been as honest as I can about negative findings that cast a shadow on the ways both of my sponsors believe that a SEN strategy should be implemented.

5.9 Confidentiality in the research model.

Confidentiality has been an important issue for my research methodology. The questionnaire that I gave to all staff allowed them the option to omit their names. I also promised them that I would only share general issues that came from the questionnaire with the head teacher and would mention nobody by name. In terms of the interviews and partnership teaching in the research, I have explained the rationale and purpose of my research and asked everybody to sign a permission form for me.

The field notes describing the partnership interactions were made anonymous by giving each teacher a number. This protects the identities of the Greenfield teachers.

The diary/critical incident journal represented the biggest challenge in terms of confidentiality. This contained incidents relating to Greenfield staff who had not given their permission to be involved in the research. I had to make some substantial alterations to identity to ensure anonymity in relation to some of these data.

5.10 An overview of the analysis of data.

I undertook the analysis of the questionnaire using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences data

programme (SPSS).

In terms of qualitative data, I transcribed each of the sound recordings of the six interviews into written dialogues. I verified that I had done this accurately by showing the participants the written transcripts and asking for any corrections. I summarised the main features of each participant's narrative and then analysed the recurring themes in the interviews using a process developed by Cooper and McIntyre (1993). This seven-stage process is an iterative process of categorization that seeks to continually refine and test the description as it unfolds. Tesch (1990) described it as empirical phenomenology: empirical since the theorizing is based on the data collected and phenomenological since it treats the participants' accounts and thoughts about their own experiences as data. The process involved:

1. Reading a random sample of scripts;
 2. Identifying points of similarity and difference among these transcripts in relation to the research questions;
 3. Generating theories, on the basis of two, describing emergent answers to the research questions;
 4. Testing theories against a new set of transcripts;
 5. Testing new theories against the transcripts that have already been dealt with;
 6. Carrying all existing theories forward to new transcripts;
 7. Repeating the above process until all data have been examined and all theories tested against all data.
- ((Cooper and McIntyre, 1993)

I undertook a close comparative analysis of the field notes from each of the partnership teaching experiences to compare and contrast themes. I linked the practical classroom experiences with the teachers back to what they had said was important for them in the interviews. After the partnership had come to an end, I analysed my diary for critical themes. Some were new and others tied in with the findings from the partnership teaching and interviews. I was able to identify some key themes that crossed all aspects of my research.

5.11 Chapter summary

In this chapter I set out the methodological rationale for the way I have constructed my research. This has involved considering the ethnographic, case study and action research approaches to qualitative research and the use of a questionnaire. I have analysed the ethical issues that my research presented, in particular significant issues around participant confidentiality juxtaposed with the desire to give readers as full and frank account of my research findings as possible. I also outlined the process of analysis.

Chapter Six: Analysis of the questionnaire data.

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I analyse the findings from the questionnaire that I used with the full teaching staff of Greenfield School. I used the SPSS programme to analyse the data. The analysis allowed me to build up a picture of how mainstream teachers feel about the expectations placed on them to teach pupils with learning difficulties in their classrooms and how they would like to be trained to fulfil the role more effectively. A copy of the questionnaire used can be found as Appendix 2.

6.2 Size and structure of the sample

Sixty seven out of 72 teaching staff filled in the questionnaire. This represents a 93 percent return rate enabling a representative account to be provided of the views of the Greenfield staff. Amongst the 67 respondents, there was an average of 10.5 years of teaching experience. This suggested that Greenfield had an experienced set of professionals, who had had a long time to practice in their profession and think about their pedagogy. The survey included all members of the senior management team who all still taught in the classroom with the exception of the head teacher. The head teacher did not have a teaching timetable.

Despite the fact that there are now newer routes into secondary teaching, the vast majority of teachers (87.9 percent) had entered the profession by completing a one year post graduate PGCE teaching qualification. 7.6 percent had entered teaching using the graduate teacher programme and only 4.5 percent had come through the Teach First, the training method aimed at newly qualified graduates from very high achieving backgrounds who have just left university.

6.3 Analysis of individual questions

6.3.1 Meeting the needs of pupils with SEN in class.

Table 6.3.1 sets out the findings in response to the question of whether staff felt that they met the needs of pupils with special needs in their classes. They were given four options of ‘always’, ‘often’, ‘occasionally’ and ‘never’. Overall, 76.1 (62.7 + 13.4) percent felt that they often or always met the needs of their pupils with learning difficulties. This left a substantial percentage (23.9%) who only occasionally or never met the needs of their pupils with learning difficulties.

Table 6.3.1: Meeting the needs of pupils with SEN in class

	Frequency of responses	Percentage
never	1	1.5
occasionally	15	22.4
often	42	62.7
always	9	13.4
Total	67	100.0

6.3.2 Being comfortable with the expectation that every teacher is a teacher of SEN.’

Table 6.3.2 sets out the responses to the question relating to the expectation that every teachers was comfortable with the idea that they were a teacher of SEN pupils. They were given four choices to select from – very comfortable, comfortable, questioning of the statement in some circumstances and uncomfortable. 62.7 percent (46.3 + 16.4) of staff felt ‘comfortable or very comfortable’ with the expectation placed upon them. But 35.9 (29.9+ 6.) percent questioned this statement or were uncomfortable about it. This was a less positive response overall than to the previous question. This suggested that teachers do their best to meet the needs of all of their pupils and feel that they often succeed, but a significant proportion feel somewhat unsure as to whether it should be their role. The differences in responses to questions 1 and 2 were followed up in the semi structured interviews and partnership teaching and diary notes. Clearly more staff felt that they met the SEN of their pupils, 76.1 percent saying often or always, while only 62.7 percent felt comfortable or very comfortable with the notion that ‘every teacher is a teacher of special needs.’

Table 6.3.2: Being comfortable with the expectation that every teacher is a teacher of special needs

	Frequency	Percentage
Uncomfortable	4	6.0
Questioning of the statement in some circumstances	20	29.9
Comfortable	31	46.3
Very comfortable	11	16.4
Total	66	98.5
Missing data	1	1.5
	67	100

6.3.3 Staff training for teaching children with SEN.

This section of the questionnaire looked at the training experiences that the teaching staff at Greenfield had undergone in their initial teacher training and then later at the school itself. Table 6.3.3 shows that school based training was seen as significantly more successful than pre-teacher college based training. I had judged that teachers would find that training that took place when they were in the practical situation of being in a school workplace allowing them to immediately experiment with what they

were learning, was going to be of more use than training that took place in the location of a training college at the onset of their careers. But I also factored in the likelihood that staff were going to be hesitant in saying negative things about school based training because I was the person responsible for it and also collecting the survey information. This might have biased the responses.

Table 6.3.3 The quality of SEN training received during initial teacher education and in school

	Training received in ITE		Training received in school	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Unsatisfactory	21	31.3	10	14.9
Satisfactory	26	38.8	28	41.8
Good	16	23.9	20	29.9
Very good	3	4.5	4	6.0
Missing data	1	1.5	5	7.5
	67	100	67	100.0

67.2 percent of the total sample (38.8 + 23.9+ 4.5) said that college based training was satisfactory or better, whereas 77.7 percent (41.8 + 29.9 + 6.0) said school based training had been satisfactory or better. 31.3 percent, nearly one third said that college based training was unsatisfactory as opposed to only 14.9 percent who said that school based training was unsatisfactory.

6.3.4 Training perceived to be useful

Staff were given a choice of four training opportunities and asked to rate them one for the most desired and five for the least desired. The choices were most desired, quite desired, neutral, some reservations and least desired. The choices presented to them were:

1. Work in partnership with the SENco or specialist teacher in my classroom on a weekly basis.
2. A day off timetable as often as possible to prepare teaching materials on my own or with other teachers in the school.
3. More time given to lesson preparation and differentiation on in service days so I can work on my own or with other teachers at the school.

4. More practical tips and helpful handouts on different strategies to work with pupils with learning difficulties.

The responses are set out in Table 6.3.4

Table 6.3.4: Responses to choices relating to Continuing Professional Development

	Working with the SENco in the classroom		A day available to prepare materials		More time for preparation on INSET days		Teachers to be given more tips/handouts	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Most desired	27	40.9	20	30.3	11	16.7	14	21.2
Quite desired	10	15.2	17	25.8	21	31.8	9	13.6
Neutral	11	16.7	10	15.2	17	25.8	17	25.8
Some reservations	13	19.7	10	15.2	14	21.2	16	24.2
Least desired	5	7.6	9	13.6	3	4.5	10	15.2
Total	66	100.0	66	100.0	66	100.0	66	100.0

Partnership teaching with the SENco was seen as the most desired form of training by 40.9 percent of the participants whereas only 30.3 percent a day off timetable to prepare materials as ‘most desired’. 16.7 percent of the participants most desired more time on teacher training days to work with colleagues to prepare materials, while 21.2 percent wanted more practical tips and hands outs on differentiation.

16.7 percent expressed a neutral expression about working with the SENco. This was a similar level of neutral response as the 15.2 percent of teachers who were offered a day off timetable to prepare materials. There were significantly higher levels of neutral response to more time on INSET days to prepare materials at 25.8 percent the same as for more tips and hands outs for teachers to advise on SEN.

In terms of the least desired type of continuing professional development, only 4.5 percent of the sample ‘least desired’ more time for preparation on INSET days, 7.5 percent least desired working with the SENco in the classroom. Significantly higher degrees of ‘least desired’ were expressed about practical handouts with tips on SEN at 15.2 percent and a day off to prepare materials at 13.6 percent.

Overall, there was much more demand for time away from the classroom or working with a teacher such as the SENco in the classroom than the desire to be given advice or information in the form of written hand outs. This suggested to me as the SENco that I should provide myself as a resource in lessons rather than arranging for more in service training time or more teaching cover to be allocated, so that staff could have more time on training days or on ordinary working days. Working with staff myself was easy to arrange by adjusting my own timetabling commitments. Other arrangements required the intervention of the head and senior leadership team which was logistically more complex. This, along with the fact that partnership teaching with the SENco was mentioned as the most popular choice,

helped me to structure later phases of this research .

6.3.5 Perceptions of the most challenging types of Special Educational Needs.

The teachers were asked to choose from the most commonly classified learning difficulties and rank them in order of challenge from 1 as the most challenging to 4 the least challenging. The choices given were Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties, Speech and Language difficulties, Children on the autistic spectrum and those with poor literacy skills.

Table 6.3.5 sets out the responses.

	Pupils with Behavioural, Social and Emotional Difficulties		Pupils with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties		Pupils with poor literacy skills		Pupils on the autistic spectrum	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Most challenging	33	50.8	19	29.2	10	15.4	7	10.9
Challenging	11	16.9	23	35.4	15	23.1	16	25.0
Some challenges	11	16.9	15	23.1	18	27.7	17	26.6
Least challenging	10	15.4	8	12.3	22	33.8	24	37.5
Total	65	100.0	65	100.0	65	100.0	64	100.0

The learning difficulty most commonly selected as most challenging was Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties. 50.8 percent of respondents found this the most challenging type of SEN. 29.2 percent found pupils with speech and language difficulties the most challenging, 15.4 percent indicated that those with weak literacy skills were the most challenging, while only 10.9 percent found pupils on the Autistic Spectrum were their biggest challenge.

Pupils with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties were found the least challenging by 12.3 percent of the sample. 15.4 percent found Behavioural, Social and Emotional Difficulties the least challenging and pupils with poor literacy skills were found to be the least challenging SEN by 33.8 percent of the teachers. Pupils on the autistic spectrum had 37.5 percent of teachers categorising that type of learning difficulty as the least challenging.

6.3.6 Differentiation strategies adopted

The second half of the questionnaire asked teachers about the differentiation strategies that they currently adopted and the ones that they would like to improve. Table 6.3.6 sets out the findings.

Table 6.3.6: Percentage responses to most frequently used differentiation strategies

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Always
One to one explanation and feedback to pupils	1.5 (1)	4.5 (3)	20.9 (14)	64.2 (43)	9 (6)
Preparation of new materials with a lower reading age	3 (2)	22.7 (15)	40.9 (27)	31.8 (21)	1.5 (1)
Key words and meanings written on the board		1.5 (1)	27.3 (18)	50 (33)	21.2 (14)
Active partnership with the support assistant	6.2(4)	9.2 (6)	35.4 (23)	36.9 (24)	12.3 (8)
Small group work with mixed ability groups		7.5 (5)	32.8 (2)	43.3 (29)	16.4 (11)
Use of visual images		3 (2)	26.9 (18)	43.3 (29)	26.9 (18)
Use of artefacts or physical props to introduce new topics	3 (2)	16.7 (11)	34.8 (23)	39.4 (26)	6.1 (4)
Use of praise in the classroom			3 (2)	26.9 (18)	70.1 (47)
Telling stories and anecdotes to illustrate learning objectives	4.5 (3)	6.1 (4)	22.7 (15)	40.9 (27)	25.8 (17)
Use of school suggested strategies	1.5 (1)	7.5 (5)	37.3 (25)	47.8 (32)	6.0 (4)

Figures in brackets are frequencies

Table 6.3.6 refers to a check list of ten common differentiation strategies that the teachers were given to choose from, that I had decided would be useful for teachers working with a range of pupils with learning difficulties. I analysed answers in terms of those that were often or always used as a named strategy. 73.2 percent of the 67 teachers often or always used one to one explanations with pupils. 71.2 percent of those who completed the questionnaire, wrote key words and their meanings on the board and 70.2 percent felt that they often or always deployed visual images in their lessons. The highest response was for the use of verbal praise. 97 percent often or always used this teaching strategy and 70.1 percent were adamant that they always used this strategy in each and every lesson. Far less popular differentiation strategies were preparing materials where only 33.3 percent said ‘often or always’ and forming an active relationship with the learning support assistant in the class room where 49.2 percent indicated often or always. The 67 teachers who completed the questionnaire represented 93 percent of the teaching staff. The context of the first training day of the 2012/13 school year meant that most staff attended and completed the questionnaire as they were present at the time. The questionnaire findings are likely, therefore to be representative of the views of the majority of teaching staff, although there may have been some who gave responses which they thought that I wanted.

Nevertheless, the staff at Greenfield seemed to be indicating in their answers to this set of questions that they used many spontaneous ‘on the spot’ differentiation strategies regularly. The list contains strategies that can be adopted during a lesson without long periods of preparation: telling a story, putting the class into small groups, giving one-to-explanations, reinforcing language by writing key words on the board or finding a picture to use as a stimulus. Staff reported less frequently producing new materials for poor readers and working with a learning support assistant. They also did not prepare artefacts or physical props to introduce new topics on a highly frequent basis. The percentage of teachers who only occasionally, rarely or never used the school’s suggested strategies on SEN was 46.3 percent, nearly half of the sample.

6.3.7 Strategies that teachers would like to learn to use better.

Teachers were given a list of strategies which were similar to those used in the question ‘which strategies do you currently use’ with the addition of role play, phrased simply as those two words on the list of choices. These are set out in Table 6.3.7. Preparing materials that cater for poor teenage readers came top of the list with 71.6 percent of the participants selecting it as a strategy that they would like to improve. This is not surprising given that teachers felt that the strategy they were using the least was preparing new materials. Only 49.2 percent of teachers had said that they ‘often or always’ worked in an active partnership with the learning support assistant in their class, so it is not surprising that 44.8 percent of teachers now indicated that they would like to improve their practice in this area. Most other strategies were mentioned by about a fifth of the participants. The only two strategies that received low responses were finding better ways of giving praise (6 percent) and using visual stimuli better lessons (9 percent). This suggests that teachers already felt that they were using these kinds of differentiation strategies well.

In the earlier question related to which type of SEN they found the most challenging, working with weak readers and writers was not frequently described as ‘the most challenging’ by the teachers with only (15.9) percent selecting it. Yet many participant teachers (71.6) wanted to learn more about creating differentiated materials for them. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that they considered dealing with poor readers and writers were part of their legitimate professional remit, while managing challenging behaviour was not something they felt comfortable for having responsibility for in the first place.

Table 6.3.7: Strategies that teachers wished to improve

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Working with learning support assistants in class	30	44.8
Improving ways of giving praise and motivating learners	4	6
Role play	15	22.4
Use of visual stimuli	6	9
Group work	14	20.9
One-to-one questioning and feedback	12	17.9
Use of anecdotal teacher and pupil talk	13	19.4
Preparing materials for poor teenage readers	48	71.6

6.3.8 Key obstacles to greater differentiation for SEN pupils

The teachers were asked to look at a list of possible obstacles to their differentiating for pupils with learning difficulties. Seven options were presented for them to choose from. They could select as many or as few from the list as they wanted. They were not asked to rank order the obstacles. The last question asked them to comment on what they perceived the biggest obstacle to be. The seven options given were as follows:

1. Not enough time to think about your lessons;
2. Too much time spent managing behaviour;
3. Not enough time to plan new materials;
4. Nervousness about trying new strategies;
5. Too much time spent on marking and assessing;
6. Too much time involved in other school tasks; and
7. Demands of schemes of work and examination requirements.

Table 6.3.8 sets out the frequencies of responses and the percentage for each category. The key perceived obstacles were overwhelmingly related to the issue of not having enough time. Six out of seven choices were directly related to there being insufficient time for special needs differentiation. The reasons for the shortage of time were varied, including thinking time, managing behaviour time, planning time, marking time, other school duties and the pressure of exam work and externally imposed teaching agendas. 73.1 percent of those who filled in the questionnaire chose to cite time to plan materials as a key obstacle and 62.7 percent commented that they did not get enough time to think about their lessons. The pressure of exams and formal schemes of work also had a return of 55.2 percent.

Even though teachers had cited children with behaviour and emotional difficulties as the most challenging problem in the classroom (50.8 percent), only 17.9 percent of them said that dealing with behaviour issues was a key obstacle to improving differentiation. Only 6 percent of teachers expressed nervousness or fear about trying out new strategies in the classroom. Time constraints and not anxiety about experimenting with new strategies were seen as the major obstacles to more varied teaching for pupils with learning difficulties.

Table 6.3.8: Obstacles to differentiating for pupils with Special Educational Needs

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Not enough time to think about my lessons	42	62.7
Too much time spent on managing behaviour	12	17.9
Too much time involved with other school tasks	34	50.7
Not enough time to plan new materials	49	73.1
Nervousness about trying new strategies	4	6
Too much time spent on marking and assessing	18	26.9
Demands of schemes of work and examination requirements	37	55.2

6.4 Summary of questionnaire findings

The questionnaire findings suggested that time shortage was a key obstacle to differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties. It was mentioned in a variety of different ways and forms. By implication staff seemed to be saying that if they had more time available in their working day, they would teach better lessons and prepare more effective teaching materials. When they were asked what additional training resources in relation to teaching children with SEN they would like, the two strongest choices were to have the SENco work with them in their lessons and to have off timetable time to work on the preparation of new materials. The teachers of Greenfield seemed to feel that they were using some differentiation strategies well, particularly verbal praise, one-to-one explanations to pupils and writing key words and their meanings on the white board. They were less likely to adopt strategies that needed to be prepared in advance such as developing new teaching materials. They most wanted to learn more about preparing new teaching materials.

When planning the next stage of my research I took into account the findings from the questionnaire. While it was not within my power to change the amount of time that staff had available for preparation, I was in the position to use more of my own timetabled time to support the work of teachers in the classroom. I could enter colleagues' classrooms and work regularly in a partnership with them. The results of the whole school survey clearly indicated that this would be the most favourable course of action for at least 40.9 percent of my colleagues – more favourable, from the teachers' perspective, than any other choice that I had asked about.

In the next chapter, I will show how I explored some of the themes from the questionnaire in my in-depth semi-structured interviews with six of my Greenfield teaching colleagues. As time pressures were clearly an issue for staff, the interviews presented a way of finding out more about the nature of the time shortage problem. I also wanted to know what the interviewees perceived to be the benefits of working with a SENco in the classroom and why this would be valuable training for them. I was also interested in why learning difficulties that involved emotional and behaviour problems were mentioned so often and what problems staff were having in preparing extra written materials that catered for pupils with poor literacy skills in their classrooms.

6.5 Chapter summary

The findings of the questionnaire completed by the Greenfield teaching staff raised issues about the best way to support mainstream teachers in differentiating for pupils with SEN in the classroom. Working with the SENco in the classroom was selected as the most desired strategy for enhancing skills. Time constraints seemed to be a major barrier to the teachers spending more time on preparing new materials even though it was a strategy that they reported wanting to learn more about. Children with emotional and behavioural difficulties were those who presented the most challenging form of SEN to deal with.

Chapter 7. The interviews.

7.1 Chapter outline

In this chapter I present the findings of six interviews with the staff of Greenfield School. In doing so, I hope to gain an understanding for my research question of how teachers make sense of their role in terms of ‘every teacher is a teacher of special needs’. Also the constraints that they face and ways that the SENco can help them. I present each interviewee individually to help the reader build up a picture of each of their characteristics. I have described what all six interviewees say under common headings.

The headings are:

- Background ;
- Life experience before teaching;

- Guiding principles underpinning their role as a teacher;
- Responses to the term ‘pupils with learning difficulties’;
- Positive strategy use;
- Previous special needs training;
- Distinctive features of approach to teaching;

In addition, three of the six interviews have shared additional headings. They are :

- Constraints on the teacher’s ability to differentiate;
- The performativity agenda ;
- The SENco’s role in relation to classroom teachers.

7.2 Context of the interviews.

In the previous chapter, I highlighted several key divergences with how at ease the mainstream teachers felt with their role as the teachers of pupils with SEN in one large secondary school in an inner urban area called Greenfield. Ninety three percent of all teaching staff responded to my questionnaire – a total of sixty seven out of seventy two teachers. 76.1 percent of them felt that they meet the needs of their pupils with learning difficulties often or always. But only 65.7 percent really felt comfortable with that role with the rest openly questioning whether this was an appropriate and manageable role in some circumstances for a mainstream teacher to have. The survey also revealed that the overwhelming majority of teaching staff felt worried about working with children with BESD.

The staff seemed to indicate that very little of the SEN training that they had experienced, helped them feel secure or fully trained to teach pupils with learning difficulties. They were interested in the idea of active classroom partnership with the SENco or another specialist teacher to help them differentiate more effectively. The questionnaire’s clearest and most unambiguous finding was that teachers felt an acute shortage of time and that this was the biggest constraining factor on improving their practice in all aspects of their pedagogy, let alone with pupils with learning difficulties.

I used my in depth conversations with six teachers to explore these issues further. Five out of the six of teachers I interviewed went on to be included in the group of staff members whom I would partnership teach with for some or all of the 2012/13 academic year. In that period, it would be possible for me to begin to answer another of my research questions on how much difference the SENco can make to mainstream teachers’ ability to differentiate better.

So what was the significance of the interviews? How did each interview add detail to the picture of how mainstream teachers make sense of their duty to teach pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and add depth to what was conveyed by the completed questionnaires?

7.2.1 Spontaneous answers in the interview.

I gave all the participants the set of interview questions in advance but as far as I could see when I conducted the interviews, not one of them had actually read them or prepared for them in any way. So on the day, I was getting very spontaneous responses to the questions that were not polished or prepared. On some occasions, participants paused and missed out questions, sometimes returning to them later and other times finding other ways of providing the same information through later questions. The spontaneity of the answers revealed the teachers' individual passions and priorities. The initial response to the question about the term 'learning difficulties' or 'special needs' was illuminating. The teachers tended to immediately talk about their most challenging or anxiety provoking pupils. In most cases pupils with BESD were the ones that they highlighted.

7.2.2 Semi-structured interviews.

My interviews were semi-structured but with all of my participants I found myself doing more than just asking questions. In most cases, the interview became a conversation rather than an interview. What was clear in the interviews was that questions relating to pupils with SEN led quickly onto issues around all pupils. As soon as the issue of time or the constraints of the working day emerged, a whole torrent of other issues came into the frame and widened the scope of the data. What started out as an investigation into how teachers managed to differentiate for pupils with learning difficulties often opened out into an investigation of how teachers managed all of their teaching. The single question grew into a much more universal investigation of teachers' conditions in their workplace.

7.2.3 Presentation of the interviews.

As explained in the chapter outline, I selected a series of common themes to group the findings, so that the reader can follow a similar pattern with each interviewee.

I asked the interviewees a basic set of questions, (see Appendix 3). The common themes were the background of the teacher and the life experiences which encouraged them to enter teaching as a profession and helped formed their guiding principles as professionals in the classroom. Life experience contributed significantly to how they made sense of their responsibilities for both mainstream and SEN pupils. I also analysed their spontaneous reaction to what they thought of when I said the words 'pupils with learning difficulties'. Each interview included a section when the teachers spoke about a time when they felt they had successfully differentiated for pupils with SEN. I focused on their previous SEN training and what would be an effective training opportunity for the future. I tried

to summarise each person's interview with what I had found out that was distinctive about that teacher and their approach to teaching.

7.3 Interview 1 - Tony.

Background to this teacher.

Tony was an Art teacher. He had four years of teaching experience and worked part time, devoting a small part of his time to working in his art studio. During the course of working with him, Tony acquired a whole school middle management position for Gifted and Talented provision.

Life experience before teaching.

Tony's background and life experiences were most influenced by his time at a cathedral singing school from the age of eight. A key negative experience in a history lesson at the cathedral school had influenced the kind of teacher he wanted to be. Tony asked a question about Jack the Ripper when the lesson was not on this topic and was admonished by a very angry teacher for getting off the point. Since then Tony had always wanted to be a different kind of teacher and had always encouraged a variety of conversation in his art lessons and a much more flexible approach to talk and learning:

'I am open to any kind of discourse in my class. In many ways the lessons I enjoy the most are when the task is only one part of it. A task has to happen for learning. But I am not task based and am interested in the learning that goes on externally for the kid around that.'

Tony went into teaching partly by accident and was not particularly motivated by a strong desire to be a teacher. He had a friend who was a teacher but also a practising artist and he thought it would be a balanced life style that would suit him well. So he had a vocation in so far as he wanted to combine teaching and art work, to teach classes in school but also to exhibit his own art in shows.

Guiding principles underpinning role as a teacher.

Tony indicated that he liked to create chaos from order and then reconstruct things. A guiding teaching principle for him was to get pupils to think about the processes of their art work and not to be obsessed by the end product. He did not like telling people how to do something or what they should next:

'When a child asks me in a lesson. 'What do I do next?' I say, 'I don't know I am not the artist.'

Tony's guiding principle to let people learn for themselves was put under pressure by the demands of the GCSE. There are criteria for each grade boundary and students have to be steered through the criteria. Tony felt the pressure of getting the class the results that the school's data predictions suggested that they should get:

‘ There's more joy and satisfaction from a kid who does it all by themselves. But there is not enough time. So you have to shove stuff in their face and it can be stifling. I try not to tell them what to do but that is a risky strategy. The kids can panic as much as the teachers.’

But Tony had come to accept that his wish for spontaneity and improvisation in his teaching could create problems and reduce his effectiveness and there was often a need for more careful planning:

‘More and more I realise that sometimes I do have to cross that t or dot that i.’

Despite his tendency to be underprepared, Tony had usually been judged as a good teacher with some outstanding features when his lessons have been observed by the Green field Senior Leadership Team.

Tony felt that key to developing as a teacher with all pupils, not just those with SEN, was the ability to understand yourself as a teacher and play to your strengths rather than fruitlessly trying to copy the traits of other practitioners. As he explained : ‘ Personality

means being the person you actually are, rather than being an up tight person who thinks he has got to behave in a particular way. When I first entered teaching, I was obviously grabbing sound bites from the teachers I had remembered or behaviour from teachers that I had seen.’

Tony's response to the term ‘pupils with learning difficulties’.

Tony spontaneously provided a description of a pupil with an aspect of BESD in the example he gave. He immediately thought of pupils who did not respond or focus to his instructions when they came into his room, pupils who did not respond to his need for them to be calm and settled at the beginning of a lesson:

‘I just need them to come and sit down and be in a little pod of calm..... they are mostly out of it. And they have lost the keys to the pod.’

Tony went on to exemplify problems that he had with pupils who would only stay on task with drawing, if he remained at their side for large proportions of time, but when his back was turned, started an argument with another pupil. He talked about the way he had learned to manage pupils with behaviour difficulties by discussing problems with other staff and observing their practice. One of Tony's

central teaching concerns was that every pupil should feel safe in his classroom and to create that atmosphere, he felt that he had to deal with a lot of psychological issues with a few pupils, to prevent them from disrupting a positive working environment.

A situation where Tony got his strategies right.

Tony had made dealing with pupils with BESD his priority SEN. He gave me a powerful example of the strategies that he used on one occasion to deal with a potentially confrontational situation with a pupil statemented for poor behaviour. He described practical strategies that he used to divert a pupil who had been about to have a temper tantrum at the very beginning of his lesson.

‘Usually an incident happens because a child has come to my room and is already upset about something. They bring it in the room and sometimes, depending on me, what I have just had and what I will be doing shortly, ecetera ecetera. But rather than put down a blank wall in front of them and say 'no, no, no,' I have seen the trouble coming and diverted it just as they have come in. I said I would like them to do me a favour and sit here. What's happened is that they haven't gone 'why are telling me to sit there?' I think the way that I have just approached them. I mean I have shouted in the past. But I am not 'a shouter'. It doesn't make any difference and also it's just pointless. And I have always found that talking mostly calmly but directly has been useful. So a situation has been diverted because I have engaged the student who I have seen looks emotionally upset. I have tried to empathise with them. I have said I have seen you look a little bit upset. I don't want to go into this with you now, but I will come over have a chat with youThe first time I worked here and I was brand new to teaching, this kid was really wound up. He came in and I said 'Hi' and he went 'RRRRr' and I clocked him. He sat down hard but quietly. He's wriggling away and you know that if anyone pokes him, he's going to go 'mental'. And I've said. 'I know you are upset. I don't know what it's about. If you want to chat to me about it, that's fine. I just need you to just be 'upset' but I am here if you want to chat about it. Then, I go and look after everybody else and they take on this kind of - I mean they can see that it's been recognised that they are upset but also you have given them some kind of responsibility which is the responsibility to look after themselves.....you say do you want to chat about it now or not in front of everybody else. It's always that softy softly, it's bringing them into that calm area but recognising that they are upset. That's the give away. You've got to recognise they are upset. They will be still screwing away. Whereas if you recognise it, they realise that you are there for them.’

Previous special needs training.

Tony was a firm believer that the best form of training was watching other teachers use practical strategies and then talking to them about how they handled difficult situations. Again, he emphasized the BESD rather than any other type of SEN. Tony liked the idea of having partnership teaching in his lesson from which he could learn. He liked the idea of getting immediate feedback from somebody

with expertise in the field such as the SENco. He was not in favour of training days where seemingly practical advice is given out, which in his words, 'isn't live'.

Tony felt that he lacked the breadth of practical knowledge to teach pupils with varying types of SEN, but he was adamant that for training to have impact, it must be hands on. He had a strong image of himself as an experiential learner:

'I can only learn that on the job. I don't respond well to rooms full of adults talking about stuff on an inset day. I am a quick learner if somebody suggests that I try something. I respond very well to advice. But they don't compute with me when a strategy comes on a piece of paper. I have to visualise that strategy, implement it and then turn it into 'my one'.

Distinctive features of Tony's approach to teaching.

Tony's concern with BESD as the key SEN stood out during his interview. He did not mention other types of learning difficulties, other than one mention of a pupil he worked with who was on the autistic spectrum. Tony had a great interest in the teacher as entertainer and performer and gave some interesting insights into how pupils with BESD challenge the teacher in that very public role.

P - 'You said off microphone that Emotional behavioural Difficulty (EBD) is a theatre. The theatre of what?

Tony - BESD is where we can focus lots of SEN issues because it is the physical. It is theatrical communication that we as teachers, are going to pick up on first. We respond to movement and sound. We don't respond to the quiet child who sits in the corner because we are too busy. I mean you will watch the TV in a pub, not because you want to watch the TV but because it's the brightest thing in the room.'

P - Given teaching is a job about public communication and a degree of theatrics. An BESD kid is a theatrical counterpoise to what you want to do?

Tony- There's an energy for a disruptive kid. There's a potential energy and the energy we have to spend to quell that is significant. There's the intrigue for the other kids from the ones that aren't behaving. It's a kind of intrigue but they have to put up with it everyday and overcome.'

What Tony chose to highlight about pupils with SEN will be of great significance when I examine the partnership teaching that I undertook with him.

7.4 Interview 2 - Lucy.

Background

Lucy had been teaching for ten years. She had been an English teacher and a Literacy Co-ordinator in several inner urban schools. Over the past three years she has taken on more teaching in SEN as well as running low level literacy intervention groups. Over the last year, she had become purely a SEN teacher of smaller intervention groups. She had been graded as 'outstanding' in all her lesson observations by school senior management. At the time of the interview, she had decided to leave teaching to be full time with her recently born son. After a few months, she returned to Greenfield school to work as a one day a week literacy consultant.

Life experience before teaching.

Lucy's mother was a SEN teacher and she was fully supported on her decision to enter teaching after university. As a teenager she had enjoyed the lessons of her Religious Studies and English teachers. She had loved the way that their teaching had a conversational and inspirational tone.

'The teachers who inspired me were the ones that cared for us as a person rather than the teachers who were really concerned about getting the work done.'

Guiding principles underpinning role as a teacher.

Lucy wanted to be like one of the inspirational teachers she had had when she was at school. But as an English teacher she felt constrained by the curriculum and the relentless pressure to ensure that the pupils achieved the grades predicted by the school. She felt that the grades that she was pushing them to obtain were not supporting a true education or a real love of the subject – the very things she valued from her teachers at school and what encouraged her into teaching.

'I have pushed them but they were not really able to get a C without a lot more pushing than they should have. They are not really capable of it on their own. Does that make sense? The curriculum is completely shaped to help them pick out a detail from the text and then make a comment about it. They haven't enjoyed Shakespeare and they probably won't be inspired to pick up a poem and read it when they have left school. But they have extracted information from a text and made a comment about it. That's what they have to do to tick the box. I have found that incredibly frustrating that my teaching has come down to basically be around assessment criteria.'

When challenged by me that she might have been too compliant with the external agenda and should have tried to have subvert it more, she agreed. She admitted that the emphasis on grades, a central part of the school performativity agenda, was not the kind of teaching that she would have wanted for her

own new born child.. Her teaching had always been judged as ‘outstanding’ and she wanted to retain that. When challenged further, she admitted that she might be prepared to let the inspection grade slip a little if it was for the right reasons:

‘ It would have to be just a ‘good’ for the right reasons..... if I had stuck two fingers up at a scheme of work because I wanted to expand the students’ minds when reading a play or poem that I thought would do them good because they would be interested in it.’

Learning from a difficult situation

Lucy spoke about her first school, Henbury (name changed), an inner urban school where she had taught an all girls group. Henbury was a school that had been an all boys school until recently. The girls that had joined when it had become co-educational were small in number and very challenging. Most other girls in the area had not wanted to be the ‘guinea pigs’ in a new mixed school. Lucy cited working with an all girl Year 8 group as a phenomenally challenging experience. She was ‘very brittle’ with them and got into ‘tit for tat confrontations’ of a highly personal nature.

‘ I would hear them coming and my whole body would stiffen. They would come in and a girl called Vanessa had a big mouth, going all the time, probably a bit like mine. It was just awful from beginning to end.’

An advisor who watched her with the class told her that she had to relax . She pointed out that when she had a bottom all boys set that were actually more challenging, she handled them better. Lucy learned in this first school that what she called the ‘girl factor’ was something she had to be aware of in her own teaching . She felt threatened and personally affronted when members of her own sex made personal remarks at her and overreacted. But she learnt to be a lot calmer and more personable with them rather than going in and expecting them to be awful.

Lucy’s response to the term ‘pupils with learning difficulties.

Lucy’s response to the term ‘learning difficulties’ was sophisticated and more comprehensive than most of the other interviewees. She had worked in the SEN department for the last few years and therefore had a much higher working knowledge of all types of learning difficulties.

‘ A child with learning difficulties, medical, behaviour, any additional difficulty that they have on their ability to achieve. It could be a specific difficulty like dyslexia, behavioural difficulties, speech difficulties or general cognitive difficulties.’

Lucy felt well able to differentiate for pupils with literacy difficulties but like most other participants immediately focused on the challenging nature of teaching a whole class well when there is a pupil with

challenging BESD needs. This was the aspect of being a SEN teacher in the mainstream that she questioned most.

‘I know what I can do for a child with low level literacy but for children with behaviour problems, do I really know how to differentiate my behaviour management? I guess I don’t really. It’s hard in a classroom.’

Positive and effective strategies used

Lucy’s detailed thoughts on the nature of differentiation in the classroom made it hard for her to admit that it was possible to get it totally right but she was willing to cite examples where she had got most things right. She gave examples when she had her class working at different levels and speeds and had been able to go round and give pupils individual help. She had produced some special written materials for some pupils but did not think that this was the key issue for good differentiation. She suggested that if a teacher was reliant on different worksheets for different pupils, those pupils might as well be taught in a different classroom:

‘ I also tried to use mixed ability groupings and I also had a very good learning support assistant. They really engaged with the lesson content and were very good at going around and knowing what each kid was doing. It was Clara. She knew every text and came to every lesson.’

Previous SEN training and future options.

Lucy mentioned previous training, but she was adamant that most was learned by watching other people teach. She cited an example of partnership teaching with the SENco at her first school, Henbury:

‘It was in a group with statements with behaviour. Her relationship with them, more humour than I would use. She knew the kids very well and her expectations were very clear. She had a behaviour plan for the lesson. A behaviour objective as well as a learning objective. She kept on drawing them back to it and to my surprise it seemed to work. I haven’t had a great deal of training to be honest. Autism training here. I never find the sit down and listening training as valuable as watching other people do it. You can read about it in a book but until you have a child in front of you.’

Like Tony, Lucy was clear that having a partner teacher in the room would be a very useful way of helping her learn to adapt her own teaching. She indicated that it could be another specialist teacher from English, who had a reputation for having imaginative special needs practice but felt that the pressure to get high GCSE grades would make that too difficult to set up:

‘Teaching is a practical thing. You need to learn by seeing other people doing it. It’s easy to give people a list of things but seeing somebody actually do them is what has an impact - as part of your

every day teaching. It's easy to tick off the training because we have done the session but it's not embedded.'

Despite praising the excellent work of Clara, a learning support assistant, Lucy was clear that most of the assistants that she worked with did not add a significant extra dimension to her teaching and some of them actively got in the way. This is a theme I will return to.

The constraints on differentiating for pupils with SEN.

I was interested to see what limited Lucy's planning lessons that met her highest standards on differentiation on a daily basis. She chose to focus on marking.

'A lot of marking. 65 hours a week was my working week at one point because I totalled it up. Ten hours a week marking roughly, if you mark course work and you are keeping up with marking books every other week and if you write comments and targets like you are told to do.'

I explored with her how many hours of teaching in a school day of five one hour lessons would be a sensible amount for teaching for an English teacher with such a demanding marking load. She felt that two or three out of five would make the job more viable within the constraints of a reasonable working day. But as she said it, we both knew that most teachers teach four or five in a working day. Time for preparation of lessons and marking must come from outside the school day. When asked about her workload she responded :

'Long hours. I get to work at 7.30 and leaving at 5.30 to 6 and often doing some work in the evening. An hour or two.'

Lucy reported becoming more relaxed and gaining more job satisfaction as she moved away from being a mainstream English teacher with the pressures to raise attainment. She felt that she gained more flexibility and professional autonomy and lost significant feelings of guilt when she moved to SEN teaching:

'I have always carried a lot of guilt. About maybe hiding a set of books in the boot of the car because they are not marked and I don't want anybody to find them. As a teacher, you always have things like that at the back of your mind. Things you haven't done and you hope you are not found out for not doing them. In the past year, with doing more special needs teaching I have felt better. Maybe that is my personality. I think a lot of people would not worry like that. But I did work long hours, so I didn't know how to fit any more in really.'

What should the SENco's role be in relation to the classroom teacher?

Lucy's response to the question about the role of the SENco was particularly detailed. She was more aware than any other participant about what a SENco's job description embraced.

Her answers were focused and unequivocal :

'More team teaching. Less meaningless paperwork. There's scope to look at the structure of the department and get in more teachers. If you had that, you would have more partnership teaching and that has to be the way forward, I think.'

Lucy would like to see the SENco focus more of their time and energy on working directly with mainstream teachers. She didn't think that other mainstream staff would ever be able to get sufficient cover or reduced timetables to be able to undertake that partnership role with their colleagues. Lucy had a very positive view of the benefits of partnership working in the classroom :

'I think that in partnership teaching people think that they are being helped and it is 'sharing'. It's nice when somebody says – let me lead this part of the lesson and you watch and come round and support. I'll create stuff for the scheme of work. It's not that I am skiving but somebody else is coming in with an expertise and may show me what to do.'

Lucy was clear that there should be more learning support teachers employed to carry out this role at the expense of learning support assistant jobs. She felt that the majority of the LSAs did not provide a very effective teaching and learning role in the classroom and proposed remodelling the workforce by having more specialist SEN teachers.

'There needs to be a balance. The main thrust of the statement always seems to be LSA support. If you want something more for a child – it is always LSA support. But perhaps the statement should say pupil A struggles in English, so let's spend that on two hours of partnership teaching in English. Instead of 8 more hours of LSA time. In terms of the educational outcome I am not sure that it would not be better to have less time but with a teacher.'

Distinctive features of Lucy's approach to teaching.

Lucy as a very experienced middle manager, mainstream English teacher and a SEN small group withdraw teacher, had more daily working knowledge of the SEN system in schools than most other participants. Her recent experience of having a child had made her review her whole approach to teaching. She did not want her son to find himself in the kind of English lessons she felt she had increasingly started to teach. Those lessons were about how to turn a grade C into a B or an A to an

A star. Lucy wanted the inspirational and spontaneous lessons she had had when she was a teenager at school. It was the kind of teaching that had taken her into teaching ten years before. Being both conformist and competitive, she liked to be graded as an ‘outstanding teacher’ by her senior colleagues but she did not like the sort of teaching that she was showing them in order to get that grade. Lucy felt confined and constricted as a mainstream English teacher and increasingly sort to relocate herself within SEN. She had returned from maternity leave more questioning of the performativity agenda at Greenfield in which she had been so successful in the past.

7.5 Interview 3 - Roy

Background .

Roy had taught for eight years and Greenfield was his second school. He was deputy head of humanities and subject leader for religious studies. At the time of the interview, he had a one year post supporting the exam preparation for Year 11 as an additional deputy head of year. Roy’s lessons were always graded ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Greenfield senior management when they had watched him teach. **I have included Roy’s interview transcript in full as appendix 5 as an example of the primary data that I collected from the teacher interviews.**

Guiding principles underpinning role as a teacher.

Roy reported being shy and introverted at school and was always frightened of getting into trouble with his teachers whom he feared would report him to his parents. He had a healthy respect for his parents and the high moral expectations that they put on him to perform well at school, particularly his father:

‘ My Mum and Dad were fantastic parents. My Dad made it clear that I was to behave. The first thing I always said internally was. ‘ Will I get into trouble for this with my Dad?’ I probably didn’t experience the things I should have experienced because ultimately I was always fearful that it would lead me to a situation where I could get in trouble.’

Roy thought that his temerity at school affected his later teacher style. He reacted to being risk averse as a school pupil by wanting to be the kind of teacher who encouraged his pupils to take as many risks as possible and make mistakes in order to learn:

‘One of my mottoes now in the classroom is to encourage people to make mistakes so they can learn from them. I try to encourage my students to do the opposite of what I did. ’

Roy firmly believed in the inclusive spirit of teaching . He saw it as his job to inspire every child to develop a real love of learning for its own sake. He was worried that the school performativity agenda with its targets might reduce the potential of the pupils to love learning and teachers to love teaching:

‘The quality of teaching should be equal for all. That is a very important principle. I believe that one of the main roles of a teacher is to inspire their students to learn. Instil this love of learning and self development which they take with them for their entire lives. I despise the idea of meeting targets and deadlines. You sap the energy of these kids with that when what you should be doing is trying to get them into the position when they want to do these things.’

Roy felt that Greenfield has given him a lot of flexibility to try and keep faith with his overriding teaching principles. As the Head of Religious Studies, he has been given free reign to set up his department as he saw fit. Roy believed many other schools were far more authoritative towards their curriculum leaders than Greenfield. However religious studies has been given limited curriculum time and this has led to an inevitable concentration of effort on the pupils taking the GCSE.

‘Exploration of material is cut short. It is replaced with the content and ‘let’s apply it to an exam question.’

Roy’s response to the term ‘pupils with learning difficulties.’

Roy, like most interviewees, immediately cited a practical example of a BESD pupil and equated learning difficulty to problems of pupil motivation and pupil/teacher connectivity. In general terms, he said that he found it very difficult to deal with pupils with what he called ‘defined’ difficulties because there were over twenty five people in a class. He also thought that being a religious studies teacher made effective differentiation for SEN hard as he relied on building positive relationships to make his teaching successful. This was challenging when he only saw pupils once a week. He gave the example of English teachers who see their pupils four times a week and therefore have a much better chance of building up those motivational positive relationships:

‘I feel my strength as a teacher is being able to provide one to one feedback to motivate a student. I personalise my conversations to what individuals want to achieve in their life. Link their targets into what they have to do in the lesson. It helps you get to your ultimate goal.’

In the practical examples he gave, I felt that he had categorised SEN as those who had BESD. In the example he described, the issue of motivation and ‘connecting’ was at the heart of what he considered to be his SEN pedagogy, but also showed that Roy sometimes found his own way of working which was time consuming for both the teacher and the teaching assistant.

Roy ‘I had to move a student. Not actually the one with the learning difficulty but one next door. I didn’t do it in a confrontational way. It was a supportive measure. But they were chatting to each other. Emotionally, I could see that this boy was much happier with the girl but when I moved her he was

not happy with it at all. He had a little bit of a tantrum and it was very difficult for me. I had to make a judgement call. First, I spoke to the children and said that it was very nice that they were enjoying each others company but it was important that you do actually leave this classroom having learnt something. So if that has to mean that I must move you then I will take that step. I did that a couple of times but it just didn't stop them doing it. I wouldn't participate in his argument after his little tantrum. The next ten minutes the boy with the learning difficulties was not very happy and didn't do any of the work. The girl worked very well and must have met at least two of the three learning objectives. It wasn't until the teaching assistant started reinforcing the message that he actually started to do some of the work. By the end of the lesson I was able to look at his work and say he had done something he could be proud of. But the fact was that during the lesson it had taken up a heck of a lot of time. One person out of 27 that were in the classroom.'

P So in terms of the 50 minute lesson. Negotiating that with the one person. How much time was that for you and the LSA?

R Collectively. I don't know. A lot. One fifth of my time. The LSA was also sitting next to the other person, so about half of her time. '

Positive strategy use.

Roy cited an example of a pupil who had a statement for communication and emotional/behavioural difficulties. The pupil had responded to praise and a celebration of his contribution to the lessons. Roy had been quick to capitalise on that positive motivation and reinforced it. Roy explained that this motivational strategy was one he would use for all pupils and not just a pupil with learning difficulties.

Roy also gave an example where his differentiation strategies had failed completely. In this situation Roy had to guard against his own disappointment and frustration overwhelming him and convert this into a moral directive for his students:

'I quell my frustration but I don't hide my disappointment. I want them to see that. It's my way of conveying a message that you are not doing what I know you are capable of and that upsets me. I am very happy to personalise it like that. I want you to do the best that you can and do well in my subject, if you care about it like I care about it. So I quell my frustration but not my disappointment.'

When I challenged Roy on the fact that he always talked about BESD when he discussed special needs, he agreed with me.

R I find that the most challenging. Speech and language I feel quite confident in my ability to get some pupils to make some degree of progress. The nature of behaviour is so unpredictable, it is the one that I

feel the least in command of.

Previous special needs training and future options.

Roy like other interviewees had not been that impressed by the kind of training he had received for SEN whilst training as a teacher and in the classroom since. He believed that he had learnt most of his practical strategies from talking to and watching other teachers. He was quite clear that talking to other teachers about what they do in their classrooms is one of the best ways of improving practice but this was not something that Greenfield or any other school had made sufficient time for:

‘Let’s talk to each other about what works with different types of kids. We only get a chance to do that unofficially. There is no definitive answer about what to do with special needs kids in this school or any other. We need a dialogue about what is valuable and what works.’

Roy was not against a training programme that gave practical tips but just felt that they often turned into a lecture and did not give participants the chance to work through a few good ideas properly. He liked the suggestions that I made that training might be better if the SENco worked alongside a subject teacher like himself in regular lessons, although he believed that it would be difficult for the SENco and subject teacher to have regular planning meetings.

Constraints on being an effective mainstream teacher differentiating for pupils with SEN.

Roy emphasized that lack of time limited the quality of his differentiation for all pupils and especially pupils with learning difficulties:

‘I would like to create resources for specific students. But the range of ability and need is such a difficult one to adequately plan for. I can’t plan individual lessons because I only see each class once a week. It is such a very wide range of needs. I can’t get to the quality I want for every single student.’

I asked Roy how he managed his time when it came to marking books. He taught religious studies to nineteen classes over the fortnightly timetable:

‘It is very difficult. I have asked that question to lots of members of staff and the only answer coming back is ‘find more time to do it !’ At the same time we talk about ‘staff well being’. The only way I have coped with it successfully this term is to reduce the amount of individual feedback that I give. Not a lot written. I like to give personal feedback. With three assessments a year when you teach in excess of 450 students a week, the feedback I want to give takes about three hours a class, the equivalent of teaching two extra working weeks a year.’

Given this substantial teaching load, I asked what workload would be manageable and enable him to prepare and mark effectively. He said he should teach no more than two or three hours out of a five

period day to keep up with all aspects of his work and work before and after school. He said with this lesson loading, he would be able to sustain a 7.30 to 5 working day.

The performativity agenda.

I asked Roy how he felt about the inspection and performativity agenda and whether it constrained his working day or encouraged him to work better.

Roy did not think that it encouraged him to work better. He believed that the Ofsted inspection agenda had created a climate of fear and encouraged teachers to play to an audience. He disliked an inspection regime which he felt did not support schools but instead threatened only to punish them :

‘It does not encourage me to work better. I feel that Ofsted is an adversary as opposed to an organisation that supports teachers. It’s natural for a teacher to be fearful of them. Coming into a classroom and potentially grading a teacher as 'unsatisfactory' without perhaps the full picture. You could argue it is useful to have experts who see a lot of teaching and learning. But it's not really useful because it creates a performance culture which encourages people to drop the ball when they are not there. They come into the school and judge teachers for two days and I don't feel that the teachers themselves are really any part of that process.’

Roy explained that he did not find the regular observations from senior management at Greenfield particularly threatening but that was because the culture of the school was supportive but he was not sure whether most schools were like that. More importantly, he said that he learned very little from the kind of feedback that came from that kind of lesson monitoring and would prefer peer observation that was formative rather than summative:

‘I encourage peer observation and team teaching. I think that if somebody comes into your lesson they should make some qualitative contribution. At the end of the lesson then, let's discuss what went well and what you would have done differently. We are qualified professionals. Our culture should be sharing about what we can do and what we think is good. But the culture is that if a lesson is judged 'unsatisfactory', it can lead to your termination of employment and feels like the sword of Damocles hanging over your head. What it should be is come and watch me teach and maybe I can learn something from you and you can learn something from me. The true power of an observation is neutralised because of the power of those who come in to observe you in an official capacity.’

Despite the many constraints on his teaching, Roy still experienced positive and joyful moments in his work. He loved the feeling that came when he saw he had made a difference to the way a pupil saw the world. He called it the ‘eureka moment’. Roy hoped to have those moments, several times a day.

What should the SENco's role be in relation to the classroom teachers?

Roy felt that the SENco should be in classrooms as often as possible creating resources during the actual lesson for pupils with low levels of literacy or modelling an activity for teachers. Roy admitted that he did not know what extent my paperwork took over my time. He said that he would come and see me for help and advice if I set aside part of my timetable for this purpose. I told him that I had tried to do something similar when I had run a lunchtime session that offered to help staff with differentiation but that virtually nobody came. Roy suggested that the problem was the issue of time and what time outside the classroom was used for.

‘That goes to that one hour of protected time a day. Teachers concentrating on their own planning and practice. What we talked about earlier. That would be time for the conversation rather than a meeting. I think that every school that wants to have outstanding teaching and learning has got to find a way of giving people the time. If they don't, it always going to be aspirational. If it is something that has to be done later, it will happen at a time when you are tired and want to go home.’

We talked about how the school day was not set up to support a professional dialogue between teachers. Any spare time was increasingly used for formal monitoring of lessons. Roy believed that he could not fit everything he wanted to do into his fifty hour working week and would have a better chance of succeeding on his key priorities if he taught no more than a three hour day. Like Lucy, Roy said that he often felt guilty about the things he had not done properly and he was walking a tightrope between survival and being caught out for his shortcomings:

‘I feel that I am sitting on a ticking time bomb. There is always something that somebody else would consider very important that I just haven't had the time to do. It could be discovered at any moment and then all the good things I do would be considered as nothing, in comparison to my inability to do that one particular task. The most obvious thing is my failure to mark one of my nineteen sets of exercise books.’

Distinctive features of Roy's approach to teaching.

Roy was an experienced humanities teacher who had a strongly inclusive ideal. He put a tremendous store on building relationships and finding different ways of connecting to pupils with all kinds of personalities and learning styles. Like Lucy and Tony, he quickly equated SEN to issues around behaviour. Like Tony and Lucy, Roy wanted the SENco to go into classrooms more and work alongside the mainstream teacher. Like the other participants, he wanted more time to prepare lessons and talk through strategies with other professionals and felt that he was always rushing and cutting corners. Like Lucy, he had been worried about the effects that the external inspection system was having on schools and the way that it constricted teachers' freedom and flexibility to learn from each other about

improving teaching.

7.6 Interview 4 – Ursula.

Background

Ursula was the Head of Languages and had been teaching at Greenfield for 7 years. This was her first and only school and the school where she had completed teaching practice. Her lessons were judged as good with some outstanding features when monitored by Greenfield senior leadership. Over the period of the research, Ursula decided that working in an inner city school as a head of department was exhausting her and she handed in her resignation. She took on a part time job covering a maternity leave in a girl's grammar school in a semi rural area.

Guiding principles underpinning Ursula's role as a teacher.

Ursula was educated in a rural comprehensive school in England and travelled to it from a small village. She responded to subjects where she enjoyed the teaching like Languages and English but really hated sport. Her school was very strict and though she did not like sport, there was no opportunity to avoid doing it by pretending not to have her kit or avoiding the luke warm shower at the end of a session. She described significant occasions when she felt powerless or humiliated by her educational experiences and being sensitive to her own students had become a key part of her own approach to being a teacher.

'I am quite sensitive to students feeling humiliated or embarrassed. I would blush up as a teenager if anybody.... I was one of those teenagers who hid in the background and did not want to be highlighted in the class. I hated it if I was. So I empathise with some of the girls who try and hide themselves. I remember being thrown out of the GCSE down to the CSE Science class. He just called me up and told me to go the other class. I can still remember that embarrassment of going bright red. It makes me sensitive to things like whether people want their levels reading out.'

Ursula did not join the teaching profession in her twenties. Her route into the profession was longer. She left school at sixteen and worked in a bank before going abroad to travel and work. She went to university at the age of 37 entered Greenfield school as a newly qualified teacher at 39.

'I knew I needed a degree and a job you needed a degree for. In those ten years when everybody else is

getting on with their careers in their thirties, I was still studying and working as a waitress and getting into debt. ’

Ursula’s late attendance at university had made her a fierce champion for pupils keeping their options open and not underestimating what they are capable of achieving as she felt that she did when she left school at sixteen and worked in a bank job without promotion prospects.

‘I really try.... I don’t know how successfully - not to deal with what my teachers said, this is as far as you can go. I try not to limit myself with thoughts about what my students’ limitations could be and what they can achieve. I try consciously not to do that because of my own experiences of schooling.’

Ursula always tried to stay calm and positive no matter how difficult the class was. She tried not to shout as she felt that this was negative and wasted energy.

Ursula’s response to the term ‘pupils with learning difficulties’.

Ursula felt that she managed to differentiate better in a class where there was some form of setting. She had always found it very difficult to teach languages to a fully mixed ability class. For her bottom sets which had lots of pupils with learning difficulties, she did find time to produce new teaching materials which had a strong visual component. Finding time to do that was a struggle but was something she had to prioritise. She accepted that every teacher in the school had to work with pupils with learning difficulties in the mainstream . Ursula was not particularly specific about what those learning needs actually were but like the vast majority of the teachers, I interviewed, when asked to give a practical example of when she had differentiated successfully, Ursula talked about handling a pupil with BESD.

Appropriate use of differentiation strategies.

Ursula decided on a situation of managing a behavioural issue:

‘I had an incident with S in his lesson. He had got in a mood and ripped his exercise book and thrown it in the bin. I didn’t say anything. I just got a piece of paper and put it on his desk. I said you will have to bring 50 pence later and buy a new book. So at the end of the lesson, he gave me 50 pence and I gave him the new book. I didn’t get into any drama about it. End of the day he came back and said can I have the 50 pence back as I am kind of hungry. And I just said okay. I gave him the 50 pence back and you can give it to me tomorrow when I see you. Off he went and I thought I would never see the 50 pence again. But he came back with it the next day and since then, our relationship has completely changed. He has been much more proactive in class as a whole and he responds and comes and tells me when he is going to miss my lesson and is not going to be in. He asks me what we are going to be doing. All of a sudden from this child - a child who used to dance and roll on the floor something had

changed. It became much more positive and he did more work.’

Previous special needs training and future options.

Ursula was not able to remember much of significance from her teacher training but some sessions at Greenfield had been useful –one carried out by the predecessor SENco to me on differentiation and one by myself on anger management. Like all other interviewees, she was positive about the idea of having an extra teacher in her classroom to help her differentiate better but was less interested in the idea of a specialist teacher like a SENco being able to model useful strategies. Ursula’s interest was in having an extra teacher or learning support assistant to work individually with pupils.

‘There is no point in me having tips. You need a physical person there to sit next to somebody. Some students do really well when they get one to one in any subject.’

The constraints on being an effective mainstream teacher differentiating for pupils with learning difficulties.

Ursula believed that she had to teach too many lessons. She taught 34 one hour lessons over a two week period of 48 timetabled lessons. Her role as head of department needed more time than the school allocated:

‘If I am not teaching, my time as a head of department gets eaten up with administrative stuff. The amount of time I spend planning my lessons is nothing to the time I spend on administration.’

The issue of the performativity agenda

Ursula felt that languages had been really squeezed by the performativity agenda at key stage four. In year 11, Greenfield aimed to ensure that pupils attained Maths and English at C grade and above as this was an important external measure of the school’s success in the league tables. This meant that borderline pupils in those subjects were constantly being taken out of option group lessons such as hers:

‘I sat with my year 11s and showed them data charts. You need to do this and this. But they say well we have been focusing on English and Maths. And I find that really hard as an option subject. We are constantly having them missing from our lessons. I don’t know where they are. When Paul (the head of the school) was in the lesson, I said to them that aspirationally 70 percent of you at the beginning of the year would get GCSE Spanish. Now I am looking at 39 percent.’

With the exception of Year 11, Ursula was disdainful of the amount of time she had to spend looking at quantitative performance. She felt that analysing it and responding to it for the school’s senior management took up a lot of valuable time that could have been given to preparing more creative

lesson materials – for all pupils and not just the ones with SEN difficulties. She felt that assigning NC levels to pupils and the way that they were supposed to progress made her teaching superficial.

Despite the constraints that Ursula felt were placed on her, she still enjoyed her teaching. Other participants variously described this as the ‘eureka moment’ (Roy) and the ‘light bulb moment’ (Robyn). Ursula described it in a different way:

‘I know it sounds mad. But I do find it rewarding most of the time. Better than those PA jobs I had before. I am never bored and time flies and I have lots of nice relationships with the students. I invest a lot of time in them but mostly I get a lot back. There are very few students that I can’t get on with.’

What should the SENco’s role be in relation to the classroom teachers?

Ursula responded differently to many of the participants in so far as having the SENco spending time with her in the classroom was not perceived as a major priority to help her improve her pedagogy. She focused on the key role of organisation of staff so that students who really needed support in lessons were getting it:

‘In an ideal world, somebody extra in everybody’s lesson and teaching staff working closer with support staff. One LSA and the teacher sharing the same timetable every lesson. That would be like a dream if you get on with the learning support assistant.’

She was honest in indicating that she did not feel that my role had a massive impact, even though she was not sure what that impact would look like, even if she had seen it. I asked her if she considered my role to be rather mystical and she agreed:

U ‘It is for me. I don’t know if it is good or bad but it does not have much impact on me.’

Distinctive features of Ursula’s approach to teaching.

Ursula, unlike Roy, Tony and Lucy before her did not have a strong sense of what a SENco’s role could be in a school. She saw it as a rather distant role that did not have any impact on her mainstream practice in working with pupils with SEN. She prioritised what she knew of my role – the person who was supposed to arrange for the allocation of LSAs in the classroom. Like other interviewees, Ursula felt pressured by the school’s performativity agenda in a school where exam results and pupil performance data was seen as central to the teaching process. She focused on the loss of classroom time as pupils were removed from her lessons for English and Maths tuition.

Ursula had a strong sense of social justice in her teaching. She did not want her pupils to limit themselves in their educational goals. This mission came from her own educational experiences which saw her leave school at the age of sixteen and return to university education in her late thirties.

Like all participants, Ursula raised the major constraint of time on her practice. She worked too many hours of the day as a teacher in the classroom and spent too much time on administration and monitoring of other colleagues as a head of department. This cut short the time for preparing new and creative materials. This was a constant refrain from all of the participants in the interviews.

7.7 Interview 5 – Robyn.

Background to Robyn as a teacher.

Robyn had been a teacher for nine years. This was divided into two periods of time, the first as an English and drama teacher in a secondary catholic school in an inner urban area for five years, followed by a ten year break in a second career in television and media. Robyn returned to teaching when she had young children and had been back in the classroom of Greenfield for four years. Robyn worked four days a week because of her responsibilities for young children.

Guiding principles underpinning Robyn's role as a teacher.

Robyn had a catholic education herself and soon developed a love of reading and writing stories, something that had stayed with her as an English teacher and that she wanted to share with others. She was top of the class at primary school and in the top stream in secondary. Her first career aspiration was to be a journalist or a teacher. As a child, Robyn had played games where she was the teacher and even gone as far as making up registers for imaginary classes.

Robyn had wanted to take typing/keyboards as a subject at school but felt pushed into academic subjects such as physics, in which she had no interest, but which was a high status subject for a top stream pupil. Robyn believed that this elitist academic ethos coloured her own first year as a teacher and she found it hard to differentiate for any of her pupils, let alone pupils with SEN.

‘There was no differentiation when I started school, so when I started teaching there was no differentiation. Coming to Greenfield, where we teach English as mixed ability was a revelation..... I had a career change and then came back into teaching at Greenfield. When I came back, it was like Dorothy stepping into the land of Oz. Everything was different. It took me six weeks to work out what ‘Think, Pair, Share’ was. I had to re-educate myself.’

I asked Robyn why having left teaching to have ten successful years in television journalism, did she want to come back to teaching. She described it as being a mixture of dislike for the way that her branch

of the media industry was changing and a rose tinted vision of what being a teacher and a mother of young children could be like:

‘I had done everything I had wanted to do in television and the company I had worked for was changing and I wasn’t sure that I was happy with the way it was changing. I didn’t want to go and re-invent myself in another TV role. I also had two young children who at the time, were five and three. They were about to embark on education as well. I wanted to spend more time with them. This is going to sound really ridiculous but I had these visions of sitting at our kitchen table in the evening with the kids doing their homework and me doing my school work and we would discuss what we learnt at school today. I thought it would contribute to domestic bliss and the timing was right.’

Like all the participants, Robyn had a strong moral purpose and drive underpinning her teaching. I asked her what job satisfaction she got from being an English teacher.

‘A light bulb moment. When a child turns round and says something. Something you haven’t thought of. It’s like in our year 11 class when they get excited about View from a Bridge. They start saying things like Charley said today, ‘She’s got very brave since she had relations with Rudolpho’ and I replied. ‘She’s not a girl anymore.’ They started to have a discussion about growing up. It’s that kind of collaborative and discursive....when there’s electricity in the room and they are bubbling and talking. Somebody says something and they pick it up. And you end up just facilitating it.’

Robyn’s response to the term ‘pupils with learning difficulties.’

Even before I had asked Robyn a question related directly to this specific heading, she had talked about working with pupils with SEN in her class as one of her most pressing issues as a teacher. She was highly anxious that she could not find ways to differentiate for the vast range of needs in her mixed ability key stage four classes:

‘Sometimes the breadth of ability in the class worries, used to really worry me. Having, you know, in year 10, having somebody who go a 2C and a 7A in the same class..... I was worried that I wasn’t going to be able to reach everybody in that class. To plan for that type of a lesson for everybody’s individual need would mean you would be planning different lessons. It’s not differentiation, it is different lessons.’

Robyn’s response was different from many of the other participant teachers in these interviews. Robyn did not immediately refer to children with BESD and give a practical example of how she had dealt with them. Robyn’s first reference point was literacy:

‘I think mainly of literacy. In English, particularly of reading and comprehension. English as a GCSE is

an exam about reading and writing.’

I asked her if she was comfortable with the expectation that every mainstream teacher was also a teacher of special needs. She answered that this was the reality but one with which she had some major anxieties particularly when the range of ability in the classroom was so wide ranging. She had grown to respect the idea of mixed ability teaching but did not believe that the needs of all pupils could be met in such classes.

Positive use of differentiation strategies.

Robyn was pleased when in a recent school Ofsted inspection, her lesson was seen by an inspector and graded ‘outstanding’. She explained this in relation to having half an hour, preparing a simplified worksheet on two of the characters in the set text, *Lord of the Flies*. By chance, the inspector went straight to one pupil and asked him questions about his work and thought that he was making excellent progress. But as Robyn pointed out, if she prepared lower reading age material for every lesson that she taught, she feared she would not have time to do much else:

‘But the main constraint is time to be able to reach every single person in that class. If I did that to the right extent in every lesson, I would not be able to teach anything else. It’s a full time job. I have had to work out ways of doing that.’

But there were times when differentiation did not work out in the way that Robyn had intended, for instance, when she had gone to some trouble to prepare a differentiated learning resource but it had not been used by the pupil it was designed for:

‘A pupil came into class one day and I said that I had sheets that I would give him and I forgot to give that pupil the special sheet. When I went over to him half way through the lesson, he had done a worksheet that was on the desk belonging to the previous class and he had just copied it out. Questions all copied out. It was a Eureka moment. I didn’t realise my mistake when I went over because he was busy writing. But it was *Animal Farm* and the level of comprehension was so low that he did not even fully click that this was something I felt really bad. I felt sad. Bad because my attention wasn’t drawn to it and I did not go over straight away. Sad because it may me realise how little understanding he had in the class. It made me feel sad because there’s a person in my class who does not have a clue what I am talking about. Copying out a worksheet for somebody two years younger than him and no idea that it wasn’t the right thing.’

Previous special needs training and future options.

Robyn like all the other participants in the interviews could not remember much about training in her previous school or whilst on teacher training. She reported attending school training at Greenfield

but did not consider it to have had a fundamental effect on her practice in the classroom. I explored other future training options with her. Robyn liked the idea of working with another professional and also thought that the idea of having time away from the classroom to prepare a good bank of resources would be extremely useful. Even as she was outlining these plans, Robyn felt constrained by the expectations she believes that Greenfield School and the government had put on her:

‘Yes, but some people would say that is differentiation. That’s just your job as a teacher.’

The constraints on being an effective mainstream teacher differentiating for pupils with SEN

As in the interview with another English teacher, Lucy, we discussed the shortage of time and particularly the burden of the hours of marking that English teachers have to do every week. Robyn said she spent less time a week marking than Lucy but still estimated it to be four hours a week. Robyn worked part time and estimated that she spent her fifth day a week, which was unpaid, sitting at home preparing and marking lessons:

‘Yes, but that fifth day has to be done. Otherwise it would be evenings and weekends but I would rather the day that I have off.’

Robyn cited time to prepare effective resources as her biggest challenge. She was clearly anxious that she could never get it right because of the wide range of abilities in her classes and the complexity of connecting with their various learning difficulties:

‘In Year 11 I have four pupils with marked SEN in my Year 11 class but they have all got different levels within themselves. But I have got another three or four border line ones, who also have difficulty with the text. It’s time consuming. Also you have the issue that some pupils don’t want to be highlighted. They say they don’t want the extra worksheets.’

The issue of the performativity agenda

A constant theme in Robyn’s interview was the way that she felt confused and pressurised with trying to meet the needs of very high achievers and demands of working with pupils with significant communication problems and low levels of literacy. She knew that she was under pressure to produce as many C grades and above at GCSE but despaired as to how she could raise the level of some of the pupils whilst stimulating the top end of the ability range.

The SENco’s role in relation to the classroom teachers.

Robyn had not thought much about the SENco’s role and did not seem to know what it might encompass. I used the word that Ursula gave, to describe the SENco role and asked if it was a

‘mystical’ one. Robyn responded to that description in the following way:

‘Oh gosh. I should ask some of my department. I would like somebody just to take some of our work and give us a bank of resources. We have interventions for different abilities. What would it be like to take out pupils with learning needs and work with them intensively. I know you do it further down the school but in Year 10 and 11 is that an option? I don’t know. I really don’t know.’

Robyn also wondered if the SENco role should not just be about working behind the scenes and deploying other staff to work alongside the classroom with the teachers. So the SENco should be an organiser of others rather than a teacher in their own right. When I ask Robyn how the role of SENco was perceived in the school, her answer implied that it was quite marginal in the Greenfield hierarchy:

‘I don’t have many conversations about SENcos. I am sorry to disappoint you.’

Distinctive features of Robyn’s approach to teaching.

Many of the participant teachers had a lot of positive things to say about teaching as a professional occupation, even if parts of their job made them feel stressed and anxious. Robyn summed up what the joys of being in the classroom were for her. In doing so, she also underlined her fundamental approach to differentiation, which was a mental state of mind. It was her wish to remove barriers in her pupils’ way and motivate and inspire them to achieve their very best.

She was most concerned about the breadth of ability to be found in a mixed ability setting and queried her ability to deal with such a wide range of learning needs. She concentrated on the literacy and language difficulties that the mixed ability parameters created for her. Like other participants, she wondered whether effective differentiation could be achieved if there was only one teacher in the room. She speculated that some pupils with low levels of language and literacy should not be in the same classroom as they were not really having their needs met.

7.8 Interview 6 Wendy.

Background to Wendy.

Wendy came from South Africa where she herself had been schooled and began her own teaching career under the apartheid regime. She spent fifteen years teaching in South Africa before coming to England to teach as a supply teacher in 2001. Since then she had worked in London and a rural part of England and held a senior management position in London as well as the position of SENco in a rural school. She had arrived at Greenfield two years earlier as a supply teacher and become Head of Media Studies in her second year. She had plans to recast her teaching career anew by returning to senior

management for a second time in an inner city school. When she was monitored by Greenfield Senior Management, her lessons were usually graded as good or outstanding.

Guiding principles underpinning Wendy's role as a teacher.

Wendy had enjoyed her schooling at a high achieving girls' school and her only frustration was that there was often an element of 'one size fits all'. This was well exemplified by her report of accounting lessons:

'I didn't like it when teachers expected me to learn at the same pace and in the same way as other children....In accounting, we were told if you get up to this exercise you have to stop there. But when I started something I just wanted to go on and do it all. I found that I could work at my own pace as quickly as I liked. It seems reasonable to me to assume that when you had finished your work, you could read a book.'

Experiences like this influenced her own teaching and she had always encouraged pupils to have a book to read if they finished the work in her lessons rather than making up unnecessary extension exercises to keep them busy.

From the age of thirteen, Wendy taught in Sunday school and so to be a school teacher was a natural evolution from that role. Wendy's commitment to social inclusion was strongly influenced by her teaching experiences in South Africa. She grew up in the time of racial segregation in South Africa and there was unrest in the township areas. Her own teachers had joined massive boycotts that shut her school for six months. When she left school, she worked for many years in an inner city township school:

'I think that every child possesses potential that is probably the starting point. There is a spark in every child. For some that spark may well lead them to do well at school but that spark may have nothing to do with school. They may have potential to do something else and be the best that they can be and that keeps me teaching. I have often taught in schools in challenging communities with challenging children.'

Wendy described the essence of teaching as looking for that 'spark' that is in each individual human being:

'It is quite easy to find if you are looking for it and quite easy to miss if you are not. Some days or weeks are better than others and some children are nicer than others.'

Wendy's response to the term 'pupils with learning difficulties.'

Possibly as a result of her own SENco background, Wendy did not immediately associate the phrase ‘pupils with learning difficulties’ with emotional/behavioural issues. She discussed memory and language issues for some children but was adamant that most of the staff in the school did not have the time in the classroom, the training or expertise to tackle the variety of learning difficulties that they encountered in the mainstream setting.

Positive use of differentiation strategies.

The story Wendy told about positive use of differentiation strategies was about a pupil with BESD that she had had to deal with while a SENco in a rural area of England. In the account, Wendy was able to gain the trust and confidence of the pupil in very small steps by keeping him back after school and talking to him every time he got into trouble in his lessons. Wendy believed that the moral of her story was that each pupil is utterly unique and requires a bespoke series of measures to help them in school:

‘Every child, regardless of whether they fit into a category is an individual. What works for one will not work for another. So it’s recognising that there are lots of ideas, strategies, thoughts and theories, that is all they are. But each child is a unique human being and you have to look for the one thing that works.’

Previous special needs training and future options.

Wendy’s period as a SENco in a rural area meant that she had experienced some training. She had completed on line training but she did not think it was enough. I suggested a series of training alternatives to her that I had outlined in my earlier questionnaire to all the staff but she felt that it was hard to locate one particular priority. Wendy felt that a teacher first needs to obtain a comprehensive knowledge of the children in their classes and then select from a range of strategies that work for those children.

The constraints on being an effective mainstream teacher differentiating for pupils with learning difficulties.

An example of what Wendy described as a situation where she failed with her differentiation strategies highlighted why many teachers often fail to integrate pupils with BESD. The level of consistency needed from any teacher is very great given the level of provocation and confrontation that a pupil can create.

P Tell me about a time when it all went wrong? You did the wrong things.

W Maybe they were the right things but they just didn’t work. I had a little boy with a statement. We worked so hard to keep him in school. We just managed. We had him two hours a day and then up to four hours. We were almost back to full days again. But he couldn’t cope in a mainstream school and

he got excluded.

P What did you do and why didn't it work?

W You cannot manage every hour of the day. Teachers are also human beings. So while you might know that in theory, the minute you raise your voice to this child he sees it as a threat and will respond in a particular way, nine times out of ten you will remember to keep your voice low but the tenth time you won't.

P Or somebody else won't?

W That's right. As long as he doesn't meet the tenth person you are okay. But inevitably he does meet the tenth person and there was a trigger and an incident that was violent. He was excluded.

Wendy was in no doubt that the biggest issue that limited her ability to cater for pupils in her class with SEN was a lack of time. Like Roy, she made a strong case for the need for more time – especially for the basic requirement that teachers can meet together and talk practical strategies through. She also pointed out that when these kind of discussions do occur they are usually about pupils who have serious behaviour problems and not other children who have other types of cognitive and communication learning difficulties:

'The biggest issue is time. You never have enough time. Time and also unified strategy but I suspect that is also linked to time. If you take a pupil like Michael, I suspect that if all the teachers who work with him had time to get together and talk about what works with him.....We often spend hours talking about people with behaviour difficulties. So we will spend hours talking about Kasey and Michael and children like them slip under the radar..... There are always a particular group of children in a school who steal everybody's attention and energy. Their needs are far more exhibitionist than others. It's there and it's in your face and you can't pretend it does not exist.'

The performativity agenda

Performativity did not feature strongly in Wendy's responses, although it was implied in some of her answers about a shortage of time.

What should the SENco's role be in relation to classroom teachers?

Like Lucy, Wendy had much say about the SENco's role as she had been a SENco in a rural area before coming to Greenfield as an English and Media Studies teacher. Both Lucy and Wendy had far more working knowledge of what a SENco did than other mainstream participants, but they were also both grounded in being mainstream teachers in their respective subjects. Wendy mentioned that she would like the SENco to make arrangements for teachers to always have the same learning support staff

working with them in a particular subject. She also suggested, in a similar way to Lucy, that learning support staff needed a higher level of qualification than many of them currently had:

‘It’s a big issue as to how you recruit learning support staff. One of the ways we looked at was recruiting graduates to it for a year before teacher training. I would say from experience that even if you are training staff every year, you are doing four weeks training every year with a new group of staff. It is worth every moment for what you get over the rest of the year.’

Wendy understood from her own experience as a SENco that my role was a very challenging one:

‘I think the SENco’s role is a horrible role in many ways. In a school, the needs are so many that anything you do is diluted and that is your biggest challenge.’

Distinctive features of Wendy’s interview.

Wendy was a very experienced teacher who had worked in two countries in both mainstream teacher and more senior managerial roles. Her own experience of being a SENco added a dimension to the responses that she gave on mainstream teachers working with pupils with learning difficulties and the way that the SENco could influence that work.

7.9 Chapter Summary.

In this chapter I have presented the interviews that I conducted with a sample of six teachers using a common set of questions. I summarised their answers with a set of headings. In the next chapter, I will undertake a thematic analysis of the common themes that evolved.

Chapter 8. Summary of key themes emerging from the questionnaires

and interviews

8.1 Chapter outline

In this chapter, I will highlight the main themes that emerged from the questionnaire and the in depth interviews of Chapters 6 and 7. Key themes to emerge were the issues of time constraints brought about by heavy teaching and marking loads and the restrictive ethos of the management performativity culture on the little time that is available for teachers to improve their practice in the classroom. Another issue to emerge was teachers' overriding emphasis on emotional behavioural challenges as an inhibiting factor in their ability to teach more effectively. The chapter also examines the need for more practical training for SEN and looks at what the role of the SENco should be in relation to this.

8.2 The profile of the sample of interviewees.

All of the interviewees had been graded as 'good', 'good with outstanding features' or 'outstanding' in relation to their teaching by the school using the Ofsted inspection criteria. They were teachers perceived as highly successful in the current school performativity culture. They were professionals who were confident enough to be interviewed and allow me to work with them in partnership teaching knowing that by doing so they would expose both the strengths and weaknesses of their own practice.

These findings are a reflection of what a confident and successful group of secondary school's teachers made of their role differentiating for pupils with SEN. I can only speculate at what the less confident or perceived less 'successful' group of teachers in the teaching community at Greenfield would have said of themselves and their practice.

8.3 Time constraints

Time constraints featured as the strongest finding in the questionnaires. 62.7 percent of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they did not have enough time to think about their lesson planning and that this was an obstacle to differentiation. 73.1 percent of the same teachers reported that they lacked time to prepare new materials for poor teenage readers and 50.7 percent stated that they spent too much time on other school tasks. I explored these themes in more detail with my six interviewees.

As I analysed the thoughts and reflections of the participants, I began to think that the time constraints they described would have applied to differentiating for pupils of all abilities and not just to those with learning difficulties. The time constraints seemed to be a significant obstacle to their overall work as teachers in the classroom. If my research question had speculated about differentiating for the most gifted and talented pupils, the constraints would probably have been similar. If the research question had posed a more general question about constraints on the working lives of teachers, I suspect the answers would have included very similar time pressures. My research had uncovered a strong

feeling of discontent and frustration about what it was like to be a teacher in the twenty first century in an English secondary school in an inner urban area. The lack of time seemed to underpin all aspects of work in the classroom.

8.4 The issue of Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD)

The questionnaire indicated that children with BESD presented a major concern for teachers. 50.8 percent cited it as the most challenging type of SEN that they had to deal with. Only 15.4 percent described it as the least challenging form of SEN to manage in the class. However, in a later section of the questionnaire, only 17.9 percent of teachers believed that managing behaviour was an obstacle that stopped them differentiating more effectively for SEN. Only 6 percent thought that they needed to learn more about using praise and motivational strategies, both important to the managing of complex behaviour. The questionnaire had presented potentially contradictory findings on BESD. These were explored further in the interviews that followed with six teachers.

Five out of six interviewees dwelt directly on the issue of pupils with BESD taking up their time and energy in the classroom and therefore taking time from working with other types of learning difficulties. Lucy, Tony, Roy, Ursula and Wendy highlighted examples of this in their transcripts both in situations where I asked them to tell me about a situation where they had implemented strategies successfully and where implementation had been unsuccessful. Only Robyn, one of the English teachers, selected the wide range of academic ability in her class as her greatest challenge. In this regard, she was clearly thinking about pupils with very low levels of literacy and poor language and communication skills.

The challenge of managing BESD was paramount in the sample of teachers that I interviewed as it was for the teachers who completed the questionnaire. For example, Tony described a pupil who came into the room in a foul temper and would inevitably have had a tantrum, if not sensitively handled. Lucy talked of her teaching experiences of an all girl class in which she felt bullied and intimidated and told me how she had to learn to relax and develop a means of communicating with students. Roy discussed a pupil he had to request to move tables in a lesson and how he handled the potential confrontational behaviour from the situation that might have destabilised the whole class. Ursula diffused a difficulty with a boy, prone to confrontation, who had ripped up his exercise book and was refusing to work. Wendy described a failed situation in which a pupil was excluded permanently because he was handled calmly and competently on nine out of ten occasions but on the tenth, a teacher was annoyed and shouted and the pupil became confrontational. There was a pervading sense that emotional and behavioural disturbance was a key issue that concerned teachers when asked about SEN. Trying to find ways of differentiating effectively for this was the pedagogy that most engaged them. It was the activity of differentiation around human interchange and connection which was the teachers' central preoccupation. Lucy, who herself had evolved into a special needs teacher and had extensive practical

knowledge of pupils with language and communication difficulties and low levels of literacy questioned her ability to differentiate effectively for pupils with BESD.

Roy gave another perspectives on the problem of BESD. Successful or unsuccessful dealing with such problem behaviours absorbed much of the precious and limited time that was available to a teacher to relate individually to pupils in their class. It took attention away from the all the other pupils, whatever their ability range. It was particularly hard on the pupils who had other types of learning difficulty and were in need of more individual teacher time.

The example Roy gave of successful behavioural differentiation took up one fifth of one lesson dealing with just one person. The same child took up half of the teaching assistant's lesson time. Roy had no choice in giving this time as a stable working environment had to be maintained for the other pupils in the room. Roy stated that he did not feel secure in implementing his range of teaching skills when he had to handle such pupils:

'The nature of behaviour is so unpredictable, it is the one that I feel the least in command of.'

Wendy provided further insights on this issue. Managing behaviour successfully seemed to be something that teachers often did well but it was a fragile and volatile process during which they felt vulnerable. Wendy described it as an experience similar to that of a trapeze artist when walking a tight rope. When managing behaviour goes wrong, the teachers feared the consequences.

Children with BESD posed a problem for the mainstream teachers completing the questionnaire and the smaller sample of six interviewees. But why did these children give rise to so much concern? To understand this, I had to try and understand the motivational forces that lay behind the interviewees' differentiation techniques.

8.5 Motivating students as a crucial teaching strategy.

The questionnaire suggested that teachers used strategies that were immediate and verbal to enhance pupil motivation. Just 6 percent of those responding to the questionnaire reported that they rarely or never gave one to one feedback and no teacher reported rarely or never using praise. In contrast to the use of these immediate and verbal strategies, when differentiation required planning in advance, the percentages of rarely and never rose significantly. For example 25.7 percent of the teachers rarely or never prepared new materials for pupils with a low reading age. 19.7 percent rarely or never prepared props or artefacts in advance of a lesson.

The six interviewees gave a fuller picture of the importance of spontaneous verbal differentiation as an important strategy adopted by teachers, particularly when interacting with pupils with BESD. The interviewees described a mind set, a moral guiding purpose that drove them to find ways to connect emotionally with their pupils. They believed that to motivate their pupils, they had to find a way to

relate, connect or engage them. Pupils with BESD made it hard to do this in a consistent manner and therefore posed a problem for whole class motivation and success. The interviewees reported that an important element contributing to their enjoyment of their work was related to personal connectivity and engagement with students was at the centre of it. Their central differentiation strategy was creating positive connection - teacher to pupil. This was expressed in a variety of different ways by the interviewees.

Lucy wanted to copy what she saw as the essence of her best teachers when she was at school. Roy described connectivity with the pupil as a 'eureka moment', Robyn described it as 'a light bulb moment' and Wendy summed up connectivity as finding the 'spark in every child'. Ursula had a passion for pupils keeping their options open and not underselling themselves in life – something she believed that she was forced to do by her school, when she left at only sixteen. Clearly, the quest to achieve connection with pupils and the resultant motivation and participation that would follow was a core teacher concern. Making connection was a strategy for differentiation that was at the centre of their approach to all pupils, including pupils with learning difficulties. Tony summed up what teachers thought was at the heart of their differentiation:

'My biggest concern is will I be able to communicate adequately with the student? There are so many children with learning difficulties. To do my best, I have to create a scenario to get them where they understand and feel comfortable.'

The interviewees did not necessarily consider why particular pupils were exhibiting poor behaviour, for instance, because they had low levels of literacy or significant speech and language difficulties and had become frustrated and disillusioned. They did not recognise that specific teaching strategies or written resources that were designed for children with such difficulties might resolve the issues and bring relief to the frustration and anger levels of those pupils. The teachers reacted to the 'behaviour' and the emotional challenge it presented to their ability to connect with that child while also sustaining the motivation of the rest of the class. They feared that one child with significant behavioural difficulties could undermine their authority in the classroom. As described earlier, Tony spoke of emotional and behaviour difficulties as 'a theatrics', which threatened to upstage the teacher's own 'dramatic' lead of the lesson.

The interviewees felt that some of the BESD pupils they were asked to teach, put them under unreasonable pressure and were too volatile to be catered for within the range of skills and experience that mainstream subject teachers should be expected to have. Has the policy for full educational inclusion outlined in the literature review put too wide a range of behaviourally challenging pupils back into mainstream schools? Roy described how BESD pupils absorbed his time. Wendy showed that pupils with other significant cognitive difficulties often went unnoticed and unsupported. There was a feeling from the interviewees that the other skills needed to work with SEN children could be learned

‘on the job’ but that pupils with BESD seriously challenged all aspects of a teacher’s daily life in the classroom.

8.6 Managing challenging behaviour

As I have explained already, improving motivation and connectivity were central to the interviewees’ differentiation strategies. This was often achieved by adopting strategies which would diffuse a difficult situation changing a pupil’s negative behaviour into behaviour which was acceptable. The questionnaire showed that 97 percent of the teachers used praise often or always and this may have played an important part in managing challenging behaviour.

The way that praise was used was developed more fully in the six interviews. In many of the oral accounts participants described situations in which they dealt with a situation in which pupils were frustrated and explosively angry. They reframed the situation patiently and gently into one in which the pupil was re-motivated and participated positively in the lesson. Moving pupils from a negative disposition to a positive one was a central theme in many of the narratives in the interviews.

8.7 Teaching loads, marking and assessment and preparation time

In the questionnaire, 26.9 percent of the teachers said that they spent too much time marking and assessing. 55.2 percent believed that developing their work on SEN differentiation was restricted by exam requirements and prescriptive schemes of work. This theme also emerged in the interviews.

One of the central constraints that the teachers participating in the interviews mentioned was the shortage of time to think about planning lessons that allowed for differentiation for pupils with SEN. They also found it hard to find the time to prepare differentiated lesson materials. They felt that this affected the quality of the lessons with pupils of all abilities and not just those with learning difficulties.

The commentaries of Lucy, Roy, Robyn and Ursula provided details about the problems of teacher timetable loadings and marking/preparation time in practice. Lucy and Robyn, both English teachers clearly felt pressured by the amount of teaching they were asked to do and the amount of marking and preparation that it generated. Lucy arrived at school at 7.30 and left close to six in the evening. She had a large amount of marking to do on a Sunday which she found demoralising. Robyn had similar problems but had elected to work four out of five days a week and have a day for preparation and marking which was unpaid. Roy’s teaching load as a Head of RS meant that up to eighteen classes and four hundred and fifty pupils came through his door over the two week Greenfield timetable. This generated a huge quantity of marking and he found it very hard to keep up with and maintain high quality levels of lesson planning. Lucy and Roy stated that they could not always keep up to date with marking and had to resort to concealment techniques to cover up for the fact that everything that should have been done was not finished.

8.8 Performativity

Dislike of monitoring and the performance management agenda.

The questionnaire did not make explicit reference to monitoring and the performance management agenda but the answers to some questions indirectly suggested that other unspecified school tasks were absorbing significant amounts of teacher time. 50.7 percent of the teachers implied that they spent too much time on other school tasks. The interviews examined the issue of monitoring and performance more closely.

The six interviewees felt that their ability to differentiate better for pupils with learning difficulties was hampered by the way that their limited non contact time was taken up with monitoring and performance management issues. They indicated that this non teaching time would be best used to discuss teaching issues with colleagues and come up with ways of experimenting with pedagogy. Instead the time was used for monitoring the teaching of others in order to meet performance management goals and being monitored through lesson observations. The routine involved in performance monitoring established a rigid formula in which interviewees felt that there was little productive benefit. The process did not help them to learn how to improve their teaching and did not encourage an ethos in which differentiation could flourish.

Lucy's interview was particularly interesting in this regard. She feared the loss of the judgement of 'outstanding' but at same time, she felt that playing safe for these showpiece lessons was restricting her teaching. She wanted to be a more exciting and innovative teacher, choose more of her own teaching materials and not implement a standard departmental scheme of work. She wanted to experiment with new and imaginative ways of teaching which would improve her range of differentiation strategies. At the same time she feared the loss of the label of 'outstanding' as it was seen as an institutional badge of honour. Lucy felt trapped in a conflict that lay between conforming to performativity norms and breaking away to do what she believed was professionally appropriate. She wanted to resist the pressure to get the highest possible examination results in English GCSE as a priority above everything else. She was inspired to rebel on the birth of her own son and the realisation that she would not want him to be taught using the style of teaching she felt pressurised into using in her own classroom.

Many of the other interviewees talked of the pressure to sacrifice the non contact time they could have used to prepare creative new teaching material for devising intervention programmes for Year 11 students who the school wanted to move from a grade D to a grade C in their GCSEs. On occasions, preparation time had to be used to make sure that any lesson monitored by senior management in the school had a positive result. Roy found the inspection system of monitoring adversarial. While the school leadership's monitoring at Greenfield was not confrontational he did not feel that it served much

productive purpose. He also suggested that a poor grade in an Ofsted inspection could be personally damaging to a teacher's career. Ursula was alienated by constantly having to look at numerical data generated by computer programmes about her pupils. She felt she spent too much of her time worrying about Year 11 results and agonising about the amount of time that her pupils were being taken out of her option subject Languages to study more Maths and English, where pupils gaining at least a C grade in GCSEs, was seen as essential for the school's profile in the league tables.

The performativity agenda led to an obsession with teaching to the exam and monitoring the way teachers taught their lessons within current national inspection standards. This seemed to take time and energy from improving teaching pedagogy in areas such as differentiation for pupils with SEN. Tony and Roy described the frantic pressurised atmosphere within schools in their interviews.

8.9 Pupil diversity

In the questionnaire 35.9 percent of the teachers did not agree with the statement that every teacher is a teacher of SEN. This was reflected in the interviews when the teachers spoke about their experiences in the classroom.

Several of the interviewees expressed the view that the range of pupils with learning difficulties was too broad to cope with in a single class. The analysis has already indicated that teachers found their time in class taken up to an excessive degree by pupils with BESD. Learning difficulties such as pupils with low levels of literacy and poor communication and language skills were also highlighted by Robyn, Ursula and Roy. These teachers stressed that SEN pupils were all individuals and that their learning difficulties required high levels of differentiation in terms of lesson preparation. Roy felt that it was very difficult to prepare appropriate lesson materials with such a wide range of abilities.

Ursula expressed the view that inner city classrooms needed to have on a regular basis a teacher and a specialist subject teaching assistant if there was to be any chance of catering for the needs of such a wide variety of learning difficulties. This was not something that she could rely on in her mixed ability classes.

8.10 Improved training

Some of the respondents to the questionnaire were dissatisfied with the types of training in relation to Special Educational Needs that they had been offered during their initial teacher training and in the school itself. The questionnaire showed that 14.9 percent of the Greenfield staff felt that their school based Special Educational Needs training was unsatisfactory and 31.3 percent felt that initial teacher training on the topic had been unsatisfactory. The more detailed comments of the interview participants implied much higher dissatisfaction rates with both.

The questionnaire showed that 40.9 percent of teachers opted for working with the SENco in their own classroom as their most desired form of professional development. This theme also emerged from the interviews. Interviewees expressed a strong wish for what I have called 'live training'. Tony's interview illustrated that teachers were looking to 'learn on the job' to develop their SEN skills.

The theme of active and 'live' training was explored in Lucy's interview. She had learned by watching a SENco manage a group with very difficult behaviour, noting the strategies adopted and then adapting her own teaching. She did not find training where she was instructed about what to do helpful. She felt that training would only become meaningful when she tried to put it into practice with pupils. She wanted an active partnership with the SENco in the classroom or another specialist teacher and thought that an exchange of ideas between professional peers was the most productive way of using scarce non-contact classroom time. Roy was quite clear that more was to be gained from this type of peer teacher interaction than monitoring of lessons by senior managers which led to a Ofsted grade of 'outstanding' or 'needs improvement'. He felt that summative judgements, a key element of the performativity agenda in schools like Greenfield took up valuable time from which little was learned about how to improve the quality of teaching. He believed that formative and non-judgemental peer exchange would be far more useful in improving the quality of differentiation for pupils with Special Educational Needs. He thought that the time spent monitoring standards would be better spent creating a culture of sharing with peers strategies that had proved useful. He stated that because of the context within which observations were undertaken which related to school performance, 'the true power of an observation is neutralised'.

So what did Roy suggest would improve differentiation? He wanted protected time in a teacher's working day so that they could meet with peers to discuss planning and practice. This time had to be allocated within the normal teaching day and not added on in the late hours of the afternoon when teachers were tired from a day in the classroom.

Underlying much of the interview data was a desire from participants for more trust in the autonomy of the teacher as a professional. Once qualified, teachers felt that they should be given more space to work together and determine their own improvement of classroom practice. The interviewees often felt frustrated that there was a loss of control in their professional life and that they were not allowed to learn from each other in the way that they would prefer. According to the interviewees, the best training available for helping teachers improve their differentiation skills lay in watching each other and talking about practice.

I asked the interviewees what they believed would be a reasonable balance between teaching and non-contact time if the aspiration of real dialogue and proper peer partnership could occur between teachers. The consensus was that teachers should teach two or three lessons out of a five lesson day

and not the current four lessons out of five. This suggests that time constraints are an important factor in a teacher's ability to improve their differentiation for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

8.11 The role of the SENco

The questionnaire did not include a question asking about the role of the SENco. However, 40.9 percent of the mainstream teachers selected working with the SENco in their classroom as their most desired form of continuing professional training suggesting that the SENco had an important practical role to play in supporting differentiation. The interviews provided further information.

Two of the six interviewees had substantial experience as both English and Special Educational Needs teachers and had very coherent and carefully thought out positions in the best way that a school SENco could help mainstream teachers differentiate more effectively for pupils with Special Educational Needs. They also understood many of the potential constraints to the SENco role.

The other interviewees knew very little about the SENco role. Ursula agreed with the observation I made in conversation with her that my role as SENco was 'mystical'. When I asked Robyn how she and other staff perceived the role of SENco at Greenfield, she was blunt in stating that mainstream teachers did not give it much thought on a day-to-day basis.

The prevailing view of the other interviewees was that it would be very useful to have the SENco working alongside them in the classroom in some form of active partnership teaching, an activity which I described earlier in this section as a 'live training' training opportunity. Other alternatives were outlined. Robyn suggested that she would like the SENco to be responsible for producing written materials for pupils with poor reading skills for classroom teachers as a central priority. The questionnaire responses revealed that only twenty eight percent of the Greenfield teachers felt that they regularly prepared such materials for those pupils with SEN. Ursula wondered if the SENco should be relieved of all classroom duties and work behind the scenes ensuring that the deployment of learning support assistants was undertaken in such a way as to maximise impact. Ursula's interview also revealed that in a perfect world, she would like a teacher and a teaching assistant to work together in a regular daily relationship for each and every lesson. Lucy on the other hand questioned whether many of the Learning Support Assistants provided effective support. She suggested that the numbers of LSAs should be reduced and that they should be replaced with trained teachers capable of providing more effective withdrawal sessions.

Beyond agreeing that it would be useful for the SENco to work in the classroom with the mainstream teachers, there was little consensus on other ways the SENco should work.

Wendy, who had herself been a SENco, best understood the complexity of the SENco's working life and the way that the role, having many different priorities, could become diluted across all of them.

8.12 Chapter Summary.

In this chapter I summarised the key emerging themes using data from the questionnaire and the six interviews. The questionnaire gave a strong indication that pupils with BESD were considered to present a significant barrier to effective differentiation for pupils with SEN in the dynamic and complex social environment of the classroom. The nature of this barrier was elaborated in the interviews. The six interviewees reported that pupils with BESD inhibited their adoption of a range of differentiation strategies for the whole class. The findings from the questionnaires and the interviews also illustrated that teachers were time pressured and believed that they were asked to teach and assess too many pupils every week. They were frustrated and somewhat fearful of the performativity agenda and believed it took time and energy away from their capacity to improve themselves as teachers. Some were dissatisfied with the training opportunities that they had been given in the past in relation to differentiation for pupils with SEN. They wanted training that was practical and based on their own immediate classroom experiences.

Having analysed the findings of the questionnaire and that of the interviews, I decided that the most relevant intervention I could pilot at Greenfield school was to give teachers what they said they would find useful and go into the classroom and carry out partnership teaching with them as their school SENco. In the next chapter, I will look at how effective my partnership work was as a way of improving differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties in the mainstream.

Chapter Nine. A description of partnership teaching relationships and an analysis of what can be learned from them.

9.1 Chapter Outline.

In this chapter, I report on partnership teaching using thematic headings that emerged from the analysis of my field notes for each of the mainstream teachers that I worked alongside. In the first half of the chapter, I go through the five partnership teaching situations and in the second half of the chapter, I try and bring out the common themes that they shared and discuss what I believe can be learned about the complexities of the SENco working in partnership with a mainstream teacher to help them with their differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties.

9.2 Partnership teaching with Tony.

The background to the partnership.

Tony was an art teacher. Our partnership relationship took place in one of his year 8 art classes. He saw that class once a week for an hour and I was with him on those occasions. He had recently been appointed Gifted and Talented Co-ordinator in the school and had a plan to introduce more literacy based work into his own art lessons and give one in every three lessons a strong element of art appreciation of famous works. As the SENco, it was my job to support him in this task as well as make other suggestions about how he could alter his practice to differentiate more effectively for the range of pupils with SEN in his classroom. His Year 8 class had at least 5 pupils with low reading ages and two pupils with speech/language and communication problems. Three of these pupils were restless and easily off task and provided a degree of negative energy in the room, which clearly fitted in to the BESD category.

How far was the teaching consistent with the teacher's stated guiding philosophy in the interview?

Tony's interview stressed the need for the teacher to have a theatrical presence in the classroom and he was most exercised by the way in which pupils with BESD could impede this. As a teacher, he aspired to teach in a non-didactic way. He did not want the teacher to dominate the process of learning from the front of the classroom. He wanted to empower his students to think of themselves as real artists and ask themselves questions about how to develop their own work. He did not want to spoonfeed answers to anybody in the room. He argued that what he really wanted was a kind of training which I have termed 'live', an expression which he coined in my interview with him and which I thought was very apt. 'Live' training is where the teacher learns by finding practical solutions to the challenges in their own classroom as they occur. In this situation with the help and guidance of the SENco.

What were Tony's signature strengths? How did he adapt his teaching to differentiate?

In this research I am going to use the term 'instant' or 'on the spot differentiation' to describe how teachers alter their practice spontaneously when they are in their lessons. This alteration of pedagogy is not planned in advance. The teachers have not spent time at home preparing it but use their learned skills in the classroom to vary what they teach and how they teach it.

Tony had great theatrical presence. He had a great sense of drama and timing. The Year 8 class was not easy to handle and had three pupils with very challenging behaviour. But Tony maintained strict control over all members of the class.

He had some good visual materials prepared for his history of art lessons, which helped get the whole class involved very quickly. He used verbal praise very frequently and with real resonance and pupils liked to get involved in his lessons by answering one of his questions correctly.

What were the areas for improvement?

In Tony's strengths lay his weaknesses. Tony's sense of drama and timing were powerful and he exuded

a kind of restless slightly ‘dangerous’ energy that he could use to wrong foot the pupils, who were a little wary and frightened of him. In terms of behaviour management, he intervened very quickly to admonish very small infringements. He could adopt a fierce manner or suddenly change from avuncular and jocular to angry. This mercurial aspect to his personality intimidated a restless Year 8 class in an end of the day lesson. But he relied on much teacher centered pedagogy to introduce his idea of art criticism/appreciation and I could see that many in the class, although they wanted to connect with him on his chosen topic, were becoming slightly bored and confused. He also kept them under tight control with any small infringement of the rule of putting up your hand and waiting to be allowed to answer a question, leading to a long teacher stare and sometimes a slightly lengthy lecture about how a rule had been infringed. Tony’s central priority as a teacher seemed to be the desire to have complete control over the individuals in the room. There was too much ‘guess what’s in teachers head’ questions and he was doing too much of the speaking. He was also introducing too many complicated art appreciation words for the majority of the class to understand. Words like ‘atmosphere’, ‘setting’, ‘mood’, ‘contrast’ and ‘tone’ were presented in a somewhat superficial way and he did not really check to see if the pupils understood them properly. I felt that the pupils needed a more carefully stepped interrogation of the ‘story’ of the historical pictures he was showing, before they were expected to handle more complex art appreciation terms. They needed more of the ‘what is this picture about?’ before they could deal with the ‘why did the artist use this style to paint it?’

My perspective on how our relationship evolved

I offered Tony the above critique early on. I advised him to differentiate from a lower starting base and I tried to persuade him gently to change his practice. Tony was a very willing participant in my research and his interview suggested that he was really open to the experiential learning that would come by a regular partnership with the SENco. He made it clear on a number of occasions that he expected this to improve his differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties more than anything else. He wanted to introduce more literacy into his subject via the art appreciation component and so my specialisms on low aged readers were seemingly invaluable. As our relationship evolved, I could see he functioned as a charismatic performer and this overrode his desire to be open minded in changing his pedagogy. He said he wanted my advice but when I offered it, he tended to ignore it. I did not find that he disputed or disagreed with it but he just continued to do exactly what he has done before. Tony remained a teacher who used language that was too complex and asked questions that were too difficult about art processes and methods. I had a feeling that even the most able pupils in the room did not really understand what he wanted them to learn any better than the pupils with learning difficulties.

To build the relationship with Tony as a ‘guest’ to his classroom, I had to think about how to proceed when meeting this seemingly insurmountable problem. I decided to work very slowly. In our end of

lesson feedbacks and discussions, I put a real stress on the positive. I did not find it difficult to praise Tony for his tremendous classroom control of a difficult and turbulent Year 8 class, although it was based on a mixture of charisma and mercurial temperament that the pupils found slightly frightening. I found his classroom control awe inspiring but at the same time it was often didactic and teacher centered. I had to keep on reminding myself, that this was a teacher who said that his central pedagogic imperative was to get individuals to break down artistic dilemmas and come up with their own solutions – the opposite of what seemed to be happening in this Year 8 class.

I realised that I needed to do something rather more than being the junior partner offering advice about differentiation for low aged readers and pupils with poor language skills. I started by producing some written materials that were differentiated downwards but Tony took them and did not use them. I decided that even though I have very little deep subject knowledge of art that I would offer to lead a lesson. I would model the oral strategies that I wanted him to try and give out written materials that I considered appropriately differentiated. I needed Tony to see that the SENco could be a real teacher in their own right and not a specialist that lacked classroom credibility. I led a lesson on Michelangelo's Pieta and was able to win myself a degree of credibility with both him and the class. To build my partnership with Tony, I had to show him that my advice could take a practical form of 'live training', an activity that he had highlighted he valued most highly in his interview. I had to be seen to take the class myself and be successful.

Despite doing this successfully, Tony's pedagogic stances did not change. He did not take any of my advice or attempt to copy my modelling of how to simplify work using more visuals and explore the storyline of pictures in a simpler way before he progressed to complex art appreciation. I felt that I had gone as far with the partnership as was productive. I stopped the partnership teaching after one term.

Tony's perspective on the partnership

Tony enjoyed working in partnership and found there were many positive aspects to it. He enjoyed collaborating and conversing about the lesson with me, before it, during and after it. He wished there could have been more time for advanced preparation together.

Tony felt that within the class itself, the partnership had created a good learning environment. He thought that my questioning of the pupils was very constructive and open ended but felt that some of the supporting differentiated materials I produced were too oversimplified and gave the pupils the answers rather than getting them to think for themselves. Tony's whole pedagogic drive to get the pupils to take all the decisions about their own learning was affronted by what he called my 'spoon feeding' by giving

the answer in the written material.

Tony appreciated the trusting and relaxed atmosphere we had constructed together and did not think he would have liked me being more prescriptive in telling him what parts of his practice needed changing. He would have been alienated by somebody telling him how to do his job. But he said he would not have minded me being more interventionist in pointing out particular pupils that needed a changed approach. His experience of working with me was that there was a constructive relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. He had not been able to construct a similar atmosphere with learning support assistants he had worked with in the past. Clearly, there was something more satisfying about having a fellow teacher with special needs expertise in the classroom with him.

The SENco's role in a partnership situation.

Subject knowledge played an important part in the evolution of a meaningful working partnership. I did not feel secure with partnership teaching in art, even though I made myself take a lead in two lessons. I also learned that when your partner is charismatic and dominant in the classroom, it is very difficult to make a positive and productive contribution to the lesson. I felt Tony's teaching style was somewhat restrictive and stopped me from establishing any significant presence in the classroom for long periods of time. I articulated advice to Tony in a mild mannered and supportive way but he seldom took any notice of it. I produced written materials to exemplify how I felt he should simplify his art appreciation lessons but he did not use them. I even taught a demonstration lesson bringing everything I thought was important together and he clearly thought it was a good lesson but still did not incorporate anything that he had seen. Tony said he wanted to change his practice but I saw little evidence in my time in partnership that he had actually done so. To be fair, to him, he was always prepared to let me interject spontaneously into any lesson where he was teaching at the front of the room. He was also happy for me to go round and give constructive individual support to pupils, in parts of the lesson when he had decided not to control the direction of the lesson from the front. Tony remained a friendly, charismatic and entertaining colleague but one whose SEN practice I found hard to influence, despite trying a number of strategies. This partnership had provided me with a much more limited role than I had wanted or expected the SENco to have.

9.3 Partnership teaching with Roy

The background.

Roy was Head of Religious Studies (R.S) in the humanities department. I partnership taught with him in two out of four of his lessons with a Year 10 group on a two week timetable. This Year 10 class was preparing to do the RS GCSE in one year rather than two. It was a mixed ability class with a very articulate and intelligent upper end but with five pupils with lower levels of literacy on the SEN register and one pupil with significant BESD.

How far was the teaching consistent with the teacher's stated guiding philosophy in the interview.

Roy wanted his pupils to take risks that he had felt constrained to take at school himself due to his own fear that his parents must see him as a model pupil. He wanted them to fulfil their potential and to be self-questioning independent learners. Roy believed that a teacher must work hard on positive reinforcement to build motivation and that finding a personal way to 'connect' with a pupil was at the core of all his work.

Overall, Roy seemed to keep to his professed principles and partnership teaching with him was not at divergence with what he had said about himself. He adhered to the principles he had set out in the earlier interview when he was in the classroom. He found ways to present complex material to all abilities in the class and involve them positively in the aims of the lesson.

What are Roy's signature strengths? How does he differentiate well on the spot?

Roy like Tony was a charismatic teacher. He was highly energetic and like Tony had a great sense of timing and understood that teaching was a performance with its own theatrical boundaries. Roy could tell a good story and entertain the class. He held attention by building high expectations of moral purpose in the room and was able to convey his universal wish for the whole class to work in partnership with him and do the best that they could. He exuded enthusiasm and energy and commitment to his pupils and they liked him and wanted to please him. Despite the fact that he spent much of his interview referring to pupils with BESD whom he had found difficult to motivate and manage, in the time I partner taught with him I saw him as very skillful at connecting with difficult pupils through a wide range of personal skills. Like Tony, he used personal praise frequently and with great impact as an instant differentiation strategy. The class were not in fear of his potentially fierce temperament like they were of Tony's but they had a healthy respect for the fact that if they were misbehaving, Roy could suddenly show his displeasure with a flash of temper, which was usually sufficient to restore good order and harmony to the room.

Roy was very good at providing visual differentiation. He often had a lesson starter of a moving or still image that really drew the attention of the class and got the lesson off to a prompt and purposeful start. These were carefully prepared in advance. Roy's best instant 'on the spot' differentiation was his ability to tell a good story and entertain. He could tell all sorts of different kinds of stories, that were examples of the Religious Studies topic under consideration and others that were personal but also related to the topic. He could focus the attention of all abilities in the room with this ability to tell stories.

What were the areas for improvement?

Roy was a very good teacher and had many strengths. He spent a lot of time preparing written materials

but they did not always cater for pupils with poor language and reading skills. He often led compellingly from the front and then asked the class to do small group oral work without going around the room and monitoring whether they were actually doing it. He was more comfortable in the role of teacher as performer than as teacher as one- to -one or small group facilitator. He sometimes allowed too much noise in the room when a class was supposed to be reading and getting on with self directed activity. This made it very difficult for pupils with learning difficulties to focus on the task they had been asked to do.

My perspective on how our relationship evolved.

My partnership relationship with Roy was more productive than my parallel partnership relationship with Tony. It was very open and reflective.

From the beginning, my lack of continuity in the room for all the timetabled lessons and the fact that both Roy and myself had many other responsibilities around the school, meant that my 'partnership' with Roy was largely through what I have termed as 'on the spot' or instant interventions. We did not plan regularly together. He took the lead on the planning and I learned intuitively about the best ways I could integrate myself into the structure of one of his lessons and spontaneously differentiate. For example, in a lesson on prejudice and the rights of gay people in Uganda, I advised him as we walked up the stairs together to get me into a conversation at the front of the class, an activity I call teacher 'real talk'. He would take one side in the argument on gay rights and I would take the other. The class enjoyed watching two teachers engaged in a real dialogue and discussion. Seeing two teachers operating like that, entertained and reassured them. It was a kind of rehearsal of adult talk. It was also a rehearsal for their own possible peer talk. Moreover, it was two professionals probing each other's arguments and creating intellectual conflict with each other. It was a real life dialogue and example of problem solving.

It was important, that this successful lesson was underpinned by key elements of preparation, based on excellent introductory differentiation. Roy's video documentary was thought provoking and immediately engaging and entertaining. Whatever the reading age or the level of English language skills in the room, pupils were quickly able to engage with it. It was controversial and to a certain extent, it was heartbreaking. The documentary showed how ordinary reasonable people were being attacked and murdered for their sexuality. The prejudice in the documentary ran deep and those who had it, voiced it in a stark way. The film gave visual, dramatic and talking points. For a skilled teacher, such as Roy, it was all he needed to structure a good lesson. He had a carefully prepared power point with questions and 'incremental steps' for the lesson but because of the informal teacher dialogue that he allowed to develop, the lesson went in a completely different direction. As part of the evolving discussion, Roy said to the class - 'Governments would pay somebody a lot of money to find a way of teaching people that would stop prejudice.'

I put my hand up and interjected spontaneously - 'No they wouldn't, they need prejudice to divide and rule. The elite groups need to control other people. Encouraging prejudice is really good way of doing that. '

Pupils became caught up in the debate. They added their own points. They joined the discussion. Roy began to steer their comments by encouraging turn taking, but I interrupted more and pupils in the class started taking sides. A very sophisticated dialogue took place in which pupils questioned the class system and the potential power of the army and police to underpin the power of the elite social class if people started to protest too much. The debate included questions on the real value of democracy. How much of what we are told in the media is just a form of 'brain washing' to keep us in our place? How much real social mobility is there in our society, despite the fact that we are sold it as a dream solution to all our problems? Do people who do well from a Greenfield school background really try and change the world or are they just absorbed into that elite? The mainstream teacher and the SENco interacted publically arguing the different viewpoints and the class were drawn into an exciting level of oracy, which was entirely impromptu.

As the relationship with Roy evolved, I was also able to develop the trust of the relationship by offering as the SENco to do some of his marking. If we look back at Roy's interview, one of his biggest constraints in differentiating for pupils with learning difficulties was the sheer numbers of classes he took on the two week timetable and the marking it generated.

Sometimes building a partnership relationship was about dealing with emergency situations that regularly occur in schools like Greenfield. One such developed in a lesson when Roy and I were supposed to be giving the class an end of unit assessment and I could tell from his body language that he was feeling stressed. Roy was not only head of RS but also deputy head of Year 11. There had been a major incident outside the school involving the year group and a number of students were going to be excluded for a very long time. This had created the need for a lot of paperwork and meetings that he was trying to fit in alongside a full teaching day. So partnership teaching on this occasion had meant slipping into a supportive relationship. He went out for fifteen minutes to deal with other matters and I ran the lesson on my own. As a SENco involved in a developing partnership I felt it was important to stand in and improvise. I thought it was vital for mainstream teachers to know that I would support them when they had difficulties. This understanding helped keep the partnership relationship trusting and supportive. Ideally, Roy and I would have planned every lesson together with me taking the lead sometimes and with him taking it on others. In practice, our differentiation took the form of impromptu dialogue best summed up by the phrase 'on the spot' that I used earlier, arguing aloud with each other from different sides of a debate and rehearsing the pupils for the controversies of a topic orally, so that they were stimulated to write in a more effective way.

Roy's perspective on the partnership

Roy enjoyed the partnership. He said that the SENco was able to give much more comprehensive and in depth partnership support than any of the LSAs he had ever had. He felt that the SENco had a deeper knowledge and understanding of learning needs in the classroom and he felt that he could always trust my judgement in knowing how to monitor progress. The LSAs were not always confident to do this and did not pick up so quickly on the pedagogic issues in the room. He felt comfortable that the SENco, as a trained teacher, thought and spoke the same language as him. He described the partnership as an ‘authentic experience.’

Roy said that partnership teaching needed time to take shape but with a trained teacher, this was a quicker process. Roy felt that he had improved his knowledge of how to produce simpler literacy materials based on the examples I had prepared for him in the lessons. But he still felt anxious about doing it on his own, despite the long term partnership we had enjoyed. Nevertheless, he could not see a better way forward than partnership. It had enabled him to participate in new practice and discuss strategies which had made him more aware of SEN in his classroom

Roy felt that the limitation to the partnership was that it was very hard to arrange planning time together. He said that as two teachers who held teaching and learning responsibilities (sometimes called TLR points in the profession) we would always be too preoccupied by other school responsibilities to be together for very long in a typical week. This meant that ‘on the spot’ differentiation was a key or as Roy explained it, ‘you have got to be good at your job and turn up to the lesson to show it’.

I had explained that I saw the partnership relationship as one of anchor teacher and additional teacher. He felt that the SENco would never find it easy to be the anchor teacher in the partnership teaching situation as in most subjects they would simply not have the subject expertise to take the lead confidently.

What did I learn about the SENco’s role in a partnership situation?

I learned that missing even one lesson out of the cycle of four lessons was a problem when trying to sustain a partnership relationship. I only participated in half of the lessons and this did not help to build up the continuity of relationships with either class or teacher. The phrase ‘partnership’ had to be defined in a very loose way and was reliant on a bond of trust between myself and Roy. He made the most of my ability to improvise ‘on the spot’ and differentiate orally. This often took the form of us modeling an argument for or against a moral or religious position. He also let me move around the room and interact on an individual basis with the pupils and model different ways of questioning for pupils of varying ability. I learned that to support him and build trust, volunteering to mark books and to prepare low aged reading materials such as worksheets, was greatly appreciated. Also, just taking over the lesson and letting him deal with an emergency was also an important part of the partnership building.

I proposed some small changes to Roy's practice and I think he has adopted them. One was to get the class to work in silence when he wanted them to get on with short bursts of written work. I suggested that this would help pupils with learning difficulties concentrate better as the noise of the off task talking was distracting. I also advised him that moving around more to talk to pupils individually would be a good thing for him to do after he had presented from the front of the class. He had a tendency to stay at the front or go to his desk at this point for a few minutes. But I also became aware of the fact that he was often very tired from his high energy performance at the beginning of the lesson and needed to recover from it rather than circulate. So it was really useful when I went around the room talking to individuals and groups as they discussed a question he had set up. However, Roy was often too tired to copy and make a part of his regular practice what I was modelling for him. I began to become increasingly aware that mainstream teachers became tired after performing and that this inhibited their ability to have productive one-to-one interactions with the pupils in the room. Taking the lead in this kind of activity became an important part of my partnership with him.

I had a really positive relationship with Roy and kept the partnership going for the whole year rather than stopping it after one term as I did with Tony. However I found myself reflecting that the fact that the relationship was relaxed may have ended up compromising it somewhat. Should I have forced myself to plan regularly with Roy in order to model partnership teaching properly? The fact that we both retreated into impromptu differentiation on the spot may be a sign of a lack of rigour in our practice that had been compromised by too much familiarity. Would I have had more impact on Roy's practice if I had gone in formally and spent only six lessons with him and given him a check list for improving his differentiation techniques at the end of that fixed period? Roy had argued for more informal peer observation and collaboration between teachers in his interview as a way of improving practice, but I found myself questioning this logic. Was it possible that relaxed intimacy between teachers was not the best way of changing practice.

9.4 Partnership teaching with Robyn

The background to the partnership.

Robyn taught eight periods of English to her Year 11 GCSE group and I partnered her in four of the eight lessons over the two weeks. Her class had a very wide range of ability from pupils designated as gifted and talented to pupils on the special needs register for speech, language and literacy problems.

How far was the teaching consistent with the teacher's stated guiding philosophy in the interview

Robyn said that she was looking for the 'light bulb' moment in her lessons and wanted to make her students independent learners, who would challenge the texts that were put in front of them. She said that she found the breadth of ability in her class very difficult to differentiate for and did not always feel comfortable catering for all pupils with learning difficulties. I found that she carried a high degree of

anxiety about this into her teaching and that this was compounded by having a GCSE class. Robyn seemed to be in a constant panic about the need to keep up with the syllabus. She used it as an argument for not experimenting with some of the strategies to change her teaching that I suggested.

What are Robyn's signature strengths? How does she differentiate well on the spot?

Robyn was an excellent actress and mimic. She could tell a story and was both witty and entertaining. These were her signature strengths when relaxed but she was seldom so in this GCSE exam class and seemed constantly anxious about meeting the demands of the syllabus. She was good at instant differentiation when she used anecdotes, especially stories about herself and her family, to illustrate fundamental truths in the text. She read stories and plays very vividly and brought them to life.

What were the areas for improvement?

Robyn was rather defeatist about differentiation. She said that she aimed at the higher ability pupils in the class and could not find ways of differentiating downwards for pupils with low levels of literacy and poor speech and communication skills. I felt that she could do more to explore story line and character interaction through various types of oral work. Her best lessons allowed her classes to explore ideas and themes through small group work and role play. Too often Robyn led from the front and dominated the room with teacher explanations about how to execute different genres of writing for the exam. She dwelt too much on linguistics and neglected the basic story line. This was ironic, given that her signature strengths involved dramatic reading, story telling and mimicry.

My perspective on how our relationship evolved.

Our relationship developed slowly and at first there was some tension between us. I tried to persuade Robyn to spend less time on teaching writing genres and differentiate more effectively by questioning pupils about plot and character interaction. I had to go slowly and gently on this issue and find opportunities where we could do things differently together and then share why it had been so successful. There were some breakthrough moments. For example, I finally got her to trust me sufficiently to have an impromptu and improvised session of teacher repartee over the topic she wanted the class to write about. Robyn was leading a lesson in which she wanted the pupils to write a newspaper article either arguing that Facebook was a blessing or a curse. We looked at the formal beginning of a possible article on the white board – but this example of modelled writing failed to hold the interest of anybody in the class.

I decided to interrupt the flow of the lesson and say to her that she should get me to model it. Then almost by default we slipped into a position where she was arguing in role that the internet was a curse for young people and I was arguing that the internet was a blessing. The dialogue had a dramatic effect

and engaged the class fully. They came to see how argument can be constructed and the types of language routines that can be used to embellish it. There was no preparation. The interchange between us was improvised but highly effective. It was a sign that barriers of formality were breaking down between us. She had understood that I knew that her preparation could not be perfect and she was beginning to see how the spontaneous interchange between us could be used to 'flavour' her lessons. I also hoped that she would see that more oral work was the most sensible form of differentiation as a build up to a written exercise. Initially, she liked to emphasize stylistic literary conventions such as the need to have topic sentences arranged into paragraphs. The majority of the class did not react positively to lessons that were about writing genres and engagement was reduced.

There were many more successful examples of Robyn relaxing and engaging in more effective oral work. The class found it entertaining to see the oral banter between us and such improvisation became a great differentiation technique. But whenever Robyn was underprepared in any way or feeling nervous about the forthcoming exams and the pressure of her students getting their target grades, she fell back into teacher dominated lessons. She would try and talk her way out of her anxiety and the lessons became non-participatory for me and most of the class. She also started to ask me to take the four pupils with significant learning difficulties out of the classroom altogether and work with them on their own. Robyn remained uncomfortable about her role as a classroom teacher for pupils with learning difficulties and this was accentuated by the pressure to get the grades for the borderline pupils in the GCSE. Throughout, the year Robyn was called to account by the head of English and her senior line manager for progress that pupils were expected to be making against their projected target grades. The acceptable grade for the school league tables was at least a grade C and pupils that were supposed to be close to that projection were constantly being monitored. Robyn felt pressured to account for their progress or lack it.

Robyn's perspective on the partnership.

Robyn indicated that she had enjoyed the improvisatory classroom banter around our discussions. She felt particularly good when working in partnership and we were graded outstanding by the Ofsted visiting inspector in the Year 11 class. She indicated that she had not always agreed with what I had been advising and was glad that, as the SENco, I had seen the restrictions on her practice as a mainstream teacher, in particular, the constraints that the exam system created and the wide range of mixed ability in the room. She said that she had taken my advice on oral differentiation – particularly the strategies of reading aloud and telling stories and agreed that it was good to emphasize what her strengths were, for instance, telling stories and her relationship with the pupils. She felt that I could have emphasized her strengths more as this would have boosted her self esteem. She indicated that relationships where another teacher came into her classroom were always going to be delicate.

But there were constraints. As I was not in every lesson – she always had to be the lead teacher. In

year 11 she said she could not risk giving me lead teacher role in many lessons because of the pressure of examinations. She wished we could have planned more closely together, though she did like the way that I created resources for her at very short notice. The fact that I would come to a lesson, see the need for a particular kind of written resource, and make it up on the spot and print it up for her before the lesson had finished. She thought that the SENco should be producing resources that were subject specific as their priority job function.

I asked her what she would have done if my relationship with her had stayed distant and prescriptive; if my feedback to her about her teaching styles had been more critical. She said she would have simply tried to find an excuse to get me out of her classroom.

What did I learn about the SENco's role in a partnership situation?

As with Roy and Tony, I tried to reinforce my relationship as a bonafide class teacher by making sure that my partnership sometimes involved leading the lessons. I realised that as the SENco this gave me more credibility with the pupils in the class and the mainstream teacher. I also produced differentiated materials for pupils with low reading ages whenever I could and gave them to Robyn in an attempt to model what would be best practice for her. She gratefully accepted them but I am not convinced that she would have the time to produce such materials on a regular basis if I was not there to do it for her. As she said in her interview with me, maybe the most important job a SENco can do is produce written materials for pupils with learning difficulties for many teachers across the school.

On the major point of getting her to interrogate the story line and character conflict of texts in a very simple step by step way using various types of oracy, I think I was only partly successful. Following the partnership she was prepared to read text out aloud with the class to make sure that they understood it rather than relying on them to read it silently to themselves - something that those with pronounced learning difficulties could not do. She used her signature strength of theatrical reading and mimicry to excellent effect on the reading of text but I was not sure that she would continue to do this when partnership teaching ended.

9.5 Partnership teaching with Ursula.

The background to the partnership.

Ursula was the Head of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and I supported her in 1 in 3 lessons over a fortnight. She had been teaching 7 years. The partnership class was a lively Year 8 bottom set with many pupils with learning difficulties.

How far was the teaching consistent with the teacher's stated guiding philosophy in the interview?

Ursula said in her interview that it was her mission to get her students to expand their horizons. She did not want them to endure what happened to her and underachieve by being encouraged to leave

school early and get a clerical job. She wanted to help them avoid some of the terrible embarrassments she felt at school, when her academic weaknesses were exposed and handled insensitively. She wanted to be the kind of teacher who handled those kinds of situations well.

What were Ursula's signature strengths? How did she differentiate well 'on the spot'?

Ursula was very enthusiastic about the principles of positive behaviour management. She tried to notice the good things that were going on in her class room and rewarded them. She remained patient and calm and avoided shouting and belittling her pupils. Her best differentiation was actually prepared in advance with powerpoint slides with excellent visual resources that were carefully structured to take small reassuring steps to learning. Her signature strengths were built upon the fact that she was caring and considerate of the children and wanted them to be happy in her lessons. She praised and rewarded frequently.

What were the areas for improvement?

As with Tony earlier, some of Ursula's signature strengths contained some 'signature weaknesses'. She used all of the positive behaviour management tools, but did so inconsistently because essentially she was too flexible with the pupils. Ursula had the opposite problem to Tony, she did not demonstrate enough 'ego' with the pupils and struggled to get her voice heard with a class that was challenging and noisy. She needed to risk there being more friction and confrontation in order to establish some non-negotiable ground rules at critical points in the lesson which she could stick to.

My perspective on how the relationship evolved.

The partnership was a light and superficial one as I participated in only one lesson a fortnight. I had to find a way of subtly backing up her authority in quite difficult situations without undermining it. After the lessons, in our conversations about how the lesson went, I suggested moments to her when she could stick more tenaciously to rules that she herself had set. This was difficult as Ursula seemed to feel sensitive and vulnerable about her classroom control. After one or two of the lessons when I spoke to her at lunchtime, I could see that she was feeling quite despondent. She talked about wanting to leave mainstream teaching and go into SEN or English as a second language teaching. During the summer term she announced that she was leaving her job and going travelling.

What did Ursula say about the partnership interaction herself?

Ursula said that she found it really positive to have somebody else in the classroom, helping her absorb the many needs of the class. She had some LSAs who did just as good a job helping as the having the SENco. So having the SENco was not specifically important in itself.

She did not think that she really asked for my advice. She thought that in the class we worked together, there were just so many things going on that it was difficult to know where to start with getting advice. Ursula thought that all the issues in the class were about behaviour management. She did not think we could ever have realistically planned together because neither of us had time to meet together in the week. She admitted that she often did her own planning one hour before the lesson started.

She did not change her view stated at the original interview that she did not really know what the SENco role was behind the scenes and it was very hard to work out what other people did with their working day in a school.

What did I learn about the SENco's role in a partnership situations.

I did not feel that I got to know Ursula well enough as I was not frequently in her lessons. She had many excellent differentiation practices for pupils with learning difficulties but her classroom management meant that she undermined many of them by not being able to create a totally stable and purposeful environment in which pupils with learning difficulties felt secure. However, it was a challenging class and many teachers would have struggled to create a successful learning environment with that group of individuals, including myself.

9.6 Partnership teaching with Wendy

The background to partnership.

This was one of the more superficial partnerships with just one lesson supported in four lessons across the fortnightly timetable in Media Studies for Year 10 GCSE. The class had four pupils on the SEN register.

How far was the teaching consistent with the teacher's guiding philosophy in the interview?

Wendy was a highly experienced teacher with a long background teaching in inner city township schools in South Africa. She had also been a SENco and an English teacher in this country and knew more about the field of SEN than any of the other teachers I worked in partnership with. Wendy's guiding teaching philosophy encouraged her to look for what she described as 'the spark' in each and every one of her pupils. She thought that you had to really get to know each pupil as an individual before you could hope to differentiate effectively for them.

What were Wendy's signature strengths? How did she differentiate well 'on the spot'?

Wendy challenged her class to think about the sophisticated methods of control that lay behind the way that the media is constructed to give out its messages. She was intellectually challenging in the classroom and pushed her pupils to think outside the normal conventions. When Wendy organised the class working individually or in groups, she was highly effective at going around the room and engaging with each pupil. She knew pupils' strengths and weaknesses as learners.

What were the areas for improvement?

Despite her special needs background, she did not prepare well stepped differentiated materials and the introduction of new materials could be somewhat haphazard. She allowed herself to talk to the class for far too much of the lesson. This left me and the pupils in a very passive position of listening and not being able to participate. However, she was happy for me to interject spontaneously into her verbal domination of the classroom and engage in some informal discussion.

My perspective on how our relationship evolved.

I found myself adapting to make the most of the potential improvised dialogue scenarios which I had learned during my recent period of partnership teaching that the class enjoyed watching and learning from. Wendy was happy to engage with this arrangement. She was the anchor teacher and I had to feed off her ideas and the direction that she had decided to give the lesson. I also made the most of parts of the lesson when the pupils were working singularly or in groups to reinforce the main teacher messages. In my feedback to Wendy I suggested that the reading level of work that students were supposed to be reading and absorbing from the internet was just a little too hard. But this was a relationship that had to be handled gently and not too prescriptively. I did not have a significant enough presence in the classroom or strong enough relationship with the group and I was very much an 'add on' to the lesson.

Wendy's perspective on the partnership.

Wendy was aware that with only one in four lessons supported by the partnership teaching in a fortnight that the partnership has been relatively superficial and that this imposed serious limitations. But she liked to think that there were the beginnings of trust between us as teachers and that that trust would help us work flexibly together in lessons. She thought that there would always be a shortage of time for the SENco and the mainstream teacher to prepare lessons together. But in a trusting relationship, the SENco could liaise quickly with the mainstream teacher and then be trusted to go away and prepare something appropriate for the lesson.

What did I learn about the SENco's role in a partnership situation?

This was a fairly typical scenario where only a secondary partnership based on a few lessons in a timetable cycle had been set up. The main teacher remained very much the anchor teacher and the I

was in a background supporting role. I had to pick up on what was happening in the lesson and differentiate ‘on the spot’. The influence that I could exert over the main subject teacher was through modelling teaching styles in the class itself and in discussing strategies used in the lesson after it was over. By doing this, I could suggest how another lesson may run better next time if the anchor teacher varied their teaching approaches in some way. My influence had to be light touch as it would be easy to alienate or offend the teacher. Wendy responded to my observations about the reading materials being too difficult in a lesson. The subject was Media Studies and there was lots of difficult reading that the pupils were accessing from web sites on the internet. We were able to liaise quickly during some lessons and find ways of going over the material again orally to help differentiate the pages of dense internet information. I did not feel I had worked closely enough with Wendy to really suggest changes to her pedagogy. The infrequent partnership meant that I had not established credibility through my relationships with the pupils in the room or through leading many lessons myself. Wendy was flexible at letting me interject in lessons and was happy to move towards a ‘buddy kind’ of partnership, which this research identified as a highly effective form of oral differentiation. There is more about this in the next section of this chapter.

9.7 Overall findings on SENco input into partnership teaching.

In Chapter 6 in which I wrote about the findings of the questionnaire, 40.9 percent of respondents gave the highest priority to partnership teaching with the SENco to help them improve their practice of differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties. Most of the teachers that I interviewed wanted the experience of what Tony termed ‘live training’ and were happy to have the SENco come into their lessons to work alongside them. But my findings about my own SENco partnership teaching with subject teachers was that this did not provide a simple panacea for improving mainstream practice towards pupils with learning difficulties. Key themes emerged from my partnership relationships which illustrated that there were layers of complexity to this strategy as an effective way of improving differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties for mainstream teachers.

9.7.1 Anchor teacher/supporting role teacher

One of the biggest limitations to the partnership was the amount of timetabled lesson time the SENco could take from their own timetable in school to devote to the partnership. The more effective partnerships I set up, were when I was in most of Robyn’s, Roy’s and Tony’s lessons with a particular class. The least effective partnerships were when I was only a partner for one or two lessons in the fortnightly timetable cycle, such as for Wendy and Ursula. My relationship with the teachers and the classes were compromised by this irregularity and I had to develop a particular form of partnership to make the relationship productive. I will explain these in greater detail in the paragraphs that follow.

In all situations, my support and partnership did not extend to one hundred percent of the subject teacher’s timetabled lessons with that class. This reinforced a fundamental classroom imbalance

which meant that the mainstream subject teacher was the anchor teacher and the SENco had the more junior teacher's role. The anchor teacher had the continuity of teaching every lesson and in most cases directed the curriculum and underpinned classroom management and relationships in the room. I tried to combat the one sidedness in the partnership by making arrangements to lead in the planning and delivery of some selected lessons. This was not always easy to do. As the SENco, I felt comfortable taking the lead in humanities or English lessons but I felt much less secure in the subject knowledge required to teach a model lesson in art. Nevertheless, it was important to model differentiation techniques that I was encouraging Tony to use more. To do so, I had to find a way of preparing a lesson on Michelangelo's Pieta sculpture, seeking help from him on some of the subject specific content. If the SENco does not lead some lessons in the partnership, it is hard for them to gain respect as a serious partner from either the pupils or the mainstream teacher they are working with. But I found that the time pressures on me and the mainstream teacher made it hard for me to take a regular lead in lessons.

I also tried to build trust in the partnerships by offering to do marking of books and assessments, as a support to the teachers I was with. On certain occasions, I also covered the lessons on my own for a period of time if the subject teacher was away. This helped build up my credibility with the pupils as a 'real teacher'.

However, the issue of anchor teacher as opposed to supporting teacher had a strong impact and limited my ability to really lead by example. In a perfect world, the SENco might be able to determine a timetable based solely on partnership teaching in a school, so that they were in each and every lesson of the mainstream teachers they elected to partner with. However, I think that most secondary school SENcos would experience the kind of constraints that I have had. My timetable was partly made up of classes that I had to teach on my own, for example a lower English set in Years 7 and 8. Much time was filled with the bureaucracy of the SEN Code of Practice and having a variety of multi-agency meetings around particularly challenging pupils. I could not give my time exclusively to all of the eight lessons of English that an English teacher like Robyn teaches her year 11 over a fortnight. If I had, I would not have been able to partner anybody else and my partnership commitment across the school would have been very restricted. So inevitably, I was only in some and not all of the lessons.

9.7.2 Partnership Oracy. Differentiation by repartee

The experience of working with my partnership teachers (5 in all) over the 2012/2013 academic year showed that the SENco is at their most effective when they weave informal dialogue into the partnership relationship. The pupils enjoyed lessons in which mainstream teacher and SENco rehearsed ideas in front of them through teacher talk, for example, when Robyn and myself took sides on whether

Face book was a useful social medium or a waste of young people's time. In this case, the male/female interchange was a bit like 'Richard and Judy' on a morning television chat show but the humour that it had, became a highly effective way of differentiating. Presenters Richard and Judy make the most of the fact that they are in fact husband and wife in real life to play out dialogues in which they explore ideas through a kind of 'teasing banter'. This kind of male/female relationship in the media was one that the pupils were aware of and found reassuring and entertaining. With Roy, I took the role of devil's advocate in certain religious and moral situations in class and helped frame an interesting and controversial argument that got all the pupils thinking, but was particularly useful for pupils with language and literacy difficulties. When SENco and mainstream teacher do not have the time to prepare together and are not in all the lessons with each other for the class in question, such relaxed 'off the cuff' informal style of oral contributions to the lesson is vital. I found that in the pressurised school day of Greenfield the interventions that worked best were when the SENco could come to a lesson and chip in with questions and comments. It is the kind of intervention that does not need to have a great deal of preparation in advance. I found that this gave me the opportunity as the SENco to model the importance of oracy in creating a language rich environment to my partnership teachers.

Across the curriculum in the lessons I supported, a lot of interchange took place with me encouraging the mainstream teacher to follow my example and go around the room, asking questions, presenting information, sometimes counter-arguments to the pupils individually. This was a hugely effective differentiation technique. The pupils enjoyed it and they settled much more purposefully and self confidently to group work and writing when they had been involved in this first. This seemed to be a highly effective 'on the spot' way of using my SENco time intelligently in the classroom. It did not need a high state of preparedness from myself or my partner teacher. The use of partner interchange at the front of a classroom orally as a double act followed by moving around the room interacting individually with the pupils were the two most successful differentiation techniques that I used with my partners. As differentiation strategies they were perhaps most effectively summed up by Roy as : 'you've got to be good at the job and turn up to the lesson.' These strategies were spontaneous and improvised. Their effectiveness was a key finding of my research.

9.7.3 The importance of building a trusting and relaxed relationships

For the kind of dialogue described in the last section to take place, there had to be trust between the participants. Each of the teachers I worked with in partnership was very different. I do not think I would have achieved any productive influence on their teaching styles and differentiation techniques, if I had not worked to build this trusting relationship. There were points in my research when I wondered whether having a good relationship in the classroom had simply reduced both myself and the mainstream teacher to the lowest possible common denominator. Had we had both become too relaxed

in our classroom manner for either of us to challenge the other's practice? Did the implied 'cosiness' of a more relaxed relationship work against me being forthright enough to tell my colleague that there was something significantly wrong with their practice and vice versa with them on me. However Robyn made it very clear to me that if I had adopted a formal and more prescriptive approach with her, she would have looked for an excuse to get me out of her classroom. Tony thought that it would have alienated him and made him feel like an outsider was trying to tell him how to do his job. The other mainstream teachers I partnered felt they were more likely to change their practice where there was trust and a relaxed relationship and more likely to stay on their guard if there was not. There were enough adversarial relationships built around the monitoring and performativity agenda between teachers in Greenfield School for any of my partner teachers to want to add another negative relationship like that to their working lives.

I found myself asking if the biggest gains to changing pedagogy were to be made in the first few weeks of working together. From then on, the relationship may have become more trusting but there was also a danger of it operating on 'auto pilot'. Both parties are hampered by time restriction on their ability to plan jointly and when they have an increasingly relaxed relationship they slip naturally into a shared position that relies solely on improvising oral differentiation in lessons. This hypothesis could benefit from further specific research.

9.7.4 The limitations to oral differentiation imposed by Initiate, Response and Evaluate (IRE)

Rampton (2011) and Coultas (2012) showed in their earlier research that teachers in inner city schools such as Greenfield find that the IRE model of teaching is difficult to sustain. Despite these difficulties, IRE still remains the anchor pedagogy for all whole class teaching. A teacher initiates a question and a pupil is selected to respond to that question. The teacher then evaluates what the pupil has said and goes on to ask further questions to the class. This three part process can be summarised by the words Initiate (I), Respond (R) and Evaluate (E). Rampton showed that in the inner city classroom the process could become unruly as pupils quickly became what he described as 'non deferential' and undermined the teacher by shouting out answers, refusing to turn take or talking amongst themselves. Coultas's study of talk in classrooms showed that many mainstream teachers felt unrelaxed about trying different forms of oracy because of a fear of losing control. Being able to control a challenging class with IRE techniques was considered a badge of honour in difficult inner city schools.

The current research showed that teachers often felt uncomfortable with IRE but continued with it because they seemed to view it as an effective way of getting information across to pupils with a wide range of academic ability. However, many of my partner teachers found the energetic performance they had to put into IRE meant that they got very tired. This meant that they did not go around the room as they had intended to do and interact with the pupils on an individual basis in later parts of the lesson as they felt too tired to expend more energy. Instead of differentiating by offering pupils different kinds

individual questioning and support, they controlled the noise levels and participation rates of the class from the front of the room. I found that some of my partner teachers also started talking from the front about the work and that there would be another stretch of teacher dominated time in the lesson. Critically, any period where the mainstream teacher dominated the proceedings in the classroom with their own talk, neither the pupils or myself could continue the one- to -one interactions and so vital differentiation opportunities were lost.

I also found that mainstream teachers fell back on talking to the class when they felt under prepared and slightly embarrassed that the SENco was in the room watching a lesson . More time was lost in which individual differentiation of the work could have been instigated by the partner teachers.

9.7.5 Time consuming differentiation methods that can create classroom management problems

In the first chapter of the literature review, I looked at research on differentiation methods. Norwich and Reid (2005) are in little doubt that teachers use the same good differentiation techniques for all pupils and not just pupils with learning difficulties. But both agree that pupils with learning difficulties need them to be adopted as high rather than low intensity strategies. In other words, a typical pupil with learning difficulties might need the teacher's time individually for longer periods of time. What my partnership teaching experiences showed was that in practical terms, one mainstream teacher had insufficient time to circulate the room and give all the individual help that is required – particularly if there are a considerable number of pupils in the room with low levels of literacy and language skills. Even if they had not tired themselves from the IRE lead from the front of the classroom and embarked on going around the room to interact individually, they could not get to all the pupils that needed help, even with the SENco in the room doing the same thing in partnership with them.

The example of a bottom set English class with many children with learning difficulties that I taught this year illustrates the practicalities of this point very well. Pupils with very low reading ages and weak language skills were being asked to write a few sentences in their own words about a favourite character in a story. They were putting up their hands and wanting help. The help took a minimum of two minutes individual time. I had to ask them to read out their answers aloud and see if they could find any mistakes or improvements. Meanwhile, other pupils who also needed the same help were beginning to get bored and frustrated with the wait and were going off task by fidgeting and even getting out of their seats. I have the addition of a regular LSA but even with two adults making themselves fully available to individuals, there was not enough personal help available for the twelve pupils there. The conclusion that I drew was that high intensity differentiation takes time and needs very small class ratios to work properly.

9.7.6 Exam requirements

Some of my partner teachers were under pressure from examination requirements, particularly the

GCSE results of borderline C grade students. I found that their anxiety about being judged by these exam results often reduced rather than enhanced their differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties. They were prone to encourage various forms of rote learning that confused pupils with learning difficulties. They were more likely to talk too much and close down their lessons for both the pupils and the partner teacher when they started to worry about exam content.

9.7.7 It is hard to change practice.

Partnership teachers vary hugely as did their interactions with me. I found that it was not easy as the partnering SENco to make significant inroads into the practice of any of the mainstream teachers that I worked with. Changing teaching routines is difficult and slow. Even when a mainstream teacher appeared to be very compliant with my wish to change an aspect of the way they taught, there was no guarantee that they would continue their newly found practice after I had gone away. I felt that the changes to pedagogy that had the most chance of staying in the teacher's repertoire were practical developments that built on what I have termed in this research project as their signature strengths. For instance, Robyn was a brilliant story teller, Roy produced excellent visual materials at the start of his lessons and Ursula was good at finding entertaining language games to play in lessons. Anything I could suggest to them that expanded their already strong practice was most likely to survive our partnership.

9.8 Self reflexivity.

Greenbank (2003) urges researchers such as myself to guard against our own prejudice when doing research by asking ourselves difficult questions about what we think we might have found out. I have reported on the secondary school SENco and mainstream subject teachers not finding the time to plan their partnership together. The largest part of the preparation for the lesson and the lead for lessons fell onto the mainstream teacher, who saw their class every lesson in the cycle whereas I, the SENco, did not. But are my findings just a reflection of my own weaknesses? It is possible that many other school SENcos would have found the time to plan properly with their partner. They may have been more insistent on themselves and the mainstream teacher getting together before each and every lesson. Equally, I have concluded that working on improvised dialogue with the mainstream teacher was a fertile way of producing a style of teacher exposition that made for effective differentiation in the lesson. However, it could have been that it was a set of skills that worked particularly well for me. Other SENcos and mainstream teachers might baulk at this advice and go about their partnership in a much more formal and measured way.

I suspect that my findings will resonate with the experiences of many SENcos and mainstream teachers and certainly warrant further research and investigation to see if they are practical and sensible differentiation strategies in the context where most teachers find themselves – rushed and pressed for time.

9.9 Chapter Summary.

In this chapter, I have presented my findings on each of the five partnership teaching scenarios using seven themes to facilitate comparison. In the second half of the chapter I have made comparisons highlighting key themes. The partnership teaching situations were variable but shortage of time to plan together meant that myself as SENco and the mainstream teacher had to find ways of improvising with spontaneous dialogue in the classroom. The IRE method of teaching pedagogy was energy sapping for some mainstream teachers I found myself working with and I noticed that they often held back from moving around their own classroom to give pupils one- to -one help – a key differentiation strategy. Some mainstream colleagues were constantly anxious about the need to maximise exam results and this appeared to make them more cautious about changing their practice and experimenting with new strategies.

Chapter Ten. The Critical Incident Journal

10.1 Chapter Outline.

In this chapter I analyse key extracts from my critical incident journal. I wrote about my work as the SENco across an academic year and the challenges that I faced in prioritising my time. My journal highlights key themes that emerged in relation to my working life, in particular the administration and multi agency meeting structure focusing on a very small number of pupils with significant BESD . Also the difficult communications with a small group of parents who wanted more help for their son or daughter's problems with dyslexia and would not accept the limited school resources that were available for this. There were also key issues in relation to the performativity agenda of an Ofsted inspection and dealing with on going tensions between my large team of learning support assistants and the mainstream staff.

All of these issues were significant because they took time away from my key priority of helping mainstream teachers differentiate more effectively in their lessons which was the task I had set myself from the SENco job description. My ability to do this was central to research.

10.2 The Critical Incident journal. How it was constructed.

I did not make entries in my critical incident journal on a daily basis. I noted key words or phrases in my teaching planner, which I would write up more fully once a week. The entries were then put into a monthly file on the computer. In all, I kept the critical incident journal for eighteen months.

All the names of the pupils and staff who appear in the critical incident journal have been changed and in some circumstances I have made more alterations to help preserve their identities. None of these people have been knowing participants to the research and therefore the preservation of their anonymity was vital.

Critical incidents are ones which I felt illuminated the key issues of a SENco's working life. Many of them had a direct relevance on my ability to support teachers in their efforts to differentiate for pupils with learning difficulties and are therefore drawn upon for this research. Parts of the journal were not relevant to the research question of how the SENco can help the mainstream teachers with their SEN role although they could provide useful data to future research that looks in detail at other issues around the role of the secondary SENco.

As a result of my questionnaire to all Greenfield teachers and the six in depth semi structured interviews that followed it, I had decided to experiment with the hands on training experience that many teachers had said they would find effective – the SENco working in partnership with them in their classrooms. But how did my own working life impinge on my ability to be a full and effective partner to them? How did other parts of my job description stop me making a priority of my partnership teaching experiences?

I have analysed my critical incident journal for recurring themes that have relevance to the research question. Most of the themes that emerged are ones that take away time from the quality of the partnership teaching experiences that I set up through the 2012/13 academic year with my interviewees. They are often experiences that stopped me having direct pupil contact, in which I can use my specialist knowledge of literacy recovery and speech/language communication in other situations around the school.

This chapter introduces a stronger element of the personal. It is a section of the research in which I have allowed my own voice to surface as the main voice. The concerns of the teachers I have interviewed and then partnership taught with can now be measured against my own individual reaction to the research questions I have posed, as the SENco of Greenfield School. I hope that the analysis of my own critical incidents will triangulate with some of the main themes that have emerged from the research so far. I include a section of the original critical incident journal as appendix 6 to illustrate the data from which my findings are constructed.

10.3 Statemented pupils with BESD and the problems that they have created for the Greenfield SENco.

10.3.1 Enrico's case

The earlier questionnaire identified pupils with BESD as a key issue for the teaching staff of Greenfield School. The findings of the interviews also identified teachers' fears about working effectively with pupils with BESD. A key finding of interviews was that teachers talked more about this type of SEN than any other, with the majority of the interviewees ignoring other types of learning difficulty in all of the practical examples that they gave to me of their own differentiation practice. The critical incident journal points to a recurring theme. As the school SENco I found that a huge amount of my time was spent working on the needs of five pupils with statements for BESD. They were pupils who were engaged in seemingly endless confrontations with mainstream teachers, which required sanctions such as internal and external exclusion from the school. Their behaviour needs stopped them accessing the curriculum but also caused serious friction for other members of the student population in the same class. But the problems they generated also set staff against each other and created tremendous pressure on me as the SENco, to provide a solution to the problems which were affecting the working harmony of the school community. The case of Enrico is a good example as this February journal entry shows;

'One BESD pupil with a hefty 30 statement hours on his timetable is sucking up so much of the Head of Year, lead learning mentor, my KS3 SENco's and my time. I am observing a very interesting phenomenon. There is a kind of 'toxicity' to a kid like this. He sets the adults who work with him off against each other because he is so hard to work with. A strategy is developed and then it breaks down. Enrico is wandering around the building during lesson time and he won't do anything he is told. He responds well to a teaching assistant on one day but then not the next. Nobody can build up a consistent rapport with him. It seems to make the staff angry and frustrated with each other. It is hard to keep a united and trusting front in organising his provision, when nothing seems to work for very long. People blame each other for not doing things. Yet in a big secondary school there are inevitably many people organising around him. One of the pupil support team supports him for his late start on his part timetable. And they forget one day and don't turn up. A LSA is away and somebody is redeployed to cover somebody or something else. Enrico is left uncovered for a period of the day. Things go wrong. We have an annual review for his special needs statement and we ask for a change of placement. To try and make sure that the case will be given some real attention by the local special needs panel, I elect to send Rachel - my deputy, to the panel to explain Enrico's case properly and the frustrations and difficulties we are having settling him.

(February 2012 journal entry)

Rachel came back from the Local Authority special needs panel distressed. She described the panel as trying to discredit the work we had done with Enrico by choosing to concentrate on the paper work to argue that we had not done a thorough enough job in trying to meet his needs. We are recommended a whole series of further interventions including one from the behaviour intervention team. Each has lengthy paperwork attached. I feel that we are being made to continue working with him to stall the Local Authority's problem of dealing with Enrico. Enrico currently cannot fit into a mainstream school but the Local Authority are unwilling to spend many thousands of pounds to send him to a more therapeutic type of special education placement. Enrico failed to cope at primary school but despite knowing this the Local Authority insisted that he be placed in a main stream secondary school. Perhaps in order to justify their decision or because they do not know what to do next, the Local Authority has held up the process by asking a series of so called external experts to assess Enrico's behaviour and learning needs. This process takes months. Enrico's expert report ends up recommending practical strategies that we have tried from day one of work with this pupil and which have not achieved consistent improvement. The Greenfield staff who have tried the strategies often have the same depth of behaviour management experience as the external experts that we are forced to invite in to suggest the same strategies again. However we have a much more detailed knowledge of the pupil personalities we are working with and a practical understanding of what strategies are practically implementable in a busy secondary school where many pupils have 5 different subject teachers a day and more than one person supporting them if they are statemented.

10.3.2 Johnny's case.

The frustrations of dealing with the Local Authority special needs department over pupils with BESD is nowhere better illustrated than the case of the year 7 pupil, Johnny. Johnny, also with an BESD statement has huge multi agency meetings convened around his problem of obsession with talking about violence and his regular verbal and physical abuse of his peers and teachers. I find myself convening large meetings for people who do not seem to have similar responsibilities and accountabilities to work productively for what is best for Johnny. This is illustrated by the journal entry from November 2012. .

'We tried to brainstorm the good things about Johnny, which actually was quite useful, when as a school you have got into a very negative frame of reference about a pupil. Then we tried to work a plan that would be error-free for Johnny. Something in the first instance, where he just could take such little steps that he just could not fail, hopefully, building from the positive onto something more challenging but still more positively framed.'

As a theoretical conceptual exercise, it was absolutely fine. But implementation in the chaotic environment of a secondary school is lurking in the shadows always. The Local Authority Behaviour Intervention Team want one LSA to work with Johnny on his 60 percent timetable. But I sit there, conscious, that on a typical late November day, I have 5 staff out of 20 off, including the lead LSA .

Some are sick and some are on trips. It is not a consistent and reliable enough team in the majority, to make a promise like that. And Johnny is not the only vulnerable and volatile kid we have to support through the day. Some of our best LSAs for behaviour are inconsistent in other ways. Some of our most reliable and regularly attending LSAs are not that good with the difficult BESD cases.

One of the behaviour gurus from the Local Authority Behaviour Intervention Team announces that Johnny made it clear to him on the day that they spent together that he knew the school couldn't contain him and the behaviour expert felt that he wanted to be re-assured that he could be contained. Such a mind set from a pupil is unusual and bordering on significant mental illness. What chance have we got of making him feel 'contained'? We cannot beat or torture him or batter him into submission. This is perhaps too complex a personal pupil mind set for us to deal with in the mainstream. There will be at least six teachers still teaching him and probably about three LSAs minimum, and a counsellor and a head of year and a lead learning mentor. It is really difficult to enforce a way of working with a very damaged and delicate individual over such a wide spectrum of individuals. Our behaviour plan for Johnny ends up being quite sophisticated and nuanced. We try and create an error free environment in which he can't fail. Getting that fine detail across to other professionals in the school who work with him is not going to be easy.

Johnny – yet another meeting two days on. It is incredible how much time dealing with one small boy is taking. I call a quick meeting to consolidate the plans made at the last meeting. One of the two Local Authority behavioural experts says that it should not go ahead, unless she and all the experts are there. But I don't have the time to negotiate a meeting that synchronises all the diaries. So the whole process threatens to become nothing but go backwards and forwards with multi agency e mails while 'Rome burns' and Johnny's behaviour is not tackled. 'Nothing' will be done. The momentum on Johnny will be lost. Yet those who are charged to implement the plan are stopped from implementing it by outsiders to the school who have no real stake in making anything happen in practical terms. I feel a sense of inertia and stagnation by multi agency meetings. There is a lack of trust by outsiders about our ability to manage complex behaviour in a sensible way. I likewise feel a lack of trust for the outsiders and their ability to come up with a plan that is actually sensible and practical within the context of a busy mainstream school. Do either party really believe that any of this will help the pupil? The written documentation grows on Johnny. The list of stakeholders who are at one meeting but not at the next and then have to be e mailed information afterwards, grows and grows. But who are the real stake holders? Maybe it is the school. The balance of work/responsibility does not fall evenly between the school and the outside advisors. Nor is the structure right to make a behaviour plan actually work. This is phoney problem solving by multiple agencies and a sham joined up thinking analysis. It wastes hours of my productive time as SENco. Time, I could spend in classrooms with teachers and pupils. Or dare I say it, writing new low aged reading materials for use in my school and in others. (November 2012 journal entry)

One of the key issues I returned to again and again in my time consuming work with pupils with BESD problems is the issue of accountability in the multi-agency setting. Outside experts are called upon to get involved with the pupils, for instance the educational psychologist or the behaviour intervention team but they often make suggestions that the school has already tried unsuccessfully to implement or has avoided trying because the organisation that would be needed to make it work consistently on a daily basis is not practical in a large secondary school. I have felt that there is a clash between a medical /therapeutic model of intervention that many of the outsiders to the school seem to want to implement and our school interventions that often involve small groups or whole classes and is not one to one. The experts from outside can withdraw from working with the pupil if they prove too difficult or challenging. They use the phrase that ‘they failed to engage.’ Our outsider experts seldom work with the pupils consistently over a long period of time and at most give one session a week for a few weeks. The classroom teachers have to go on working with the pupils however little they engage with the process of changing their behaviour and during this time they continue to disrupt the lessons of pupils around them. The imbalance between the two approaches causes a lot of tension in my role as SENCo and absorbs a lot of my working day. I find myself empathizing with the classroom teachers in their predicament because I myself teach very challenging pupils every week and know how difficult it can be. So much so, that I write an e mail to my line manager, the assistant head teacher for inclusion, about how the meetings around Johnny are impeding me from getting on with the rest of my job description.

‘ I have spent something like five hours in the last eight school days in meetings with outside agencies, with Johnny’s parents and then writing up a Multi Agency Pastoral support plan. Obviously, this is a part of my job and I am happy to do it. But it is having a knock on effect on my other work with the many other statemented pupils, preparation for the possible inspection and the effectiveness of my role as partner teacher with those who I am working with.

I also feel that whatever I do, the staff in the school are not happy and the Local Authority is not happy. I feel stuck like a ‘piggy in the middle ‘ in a kind of no win situation and it is getting pretty stressful. ‘ (December 2012 journal entry)

The Johnny situation continues over the months and demonstrates a form of paralysis in the so called inclusive system, where the school cannot handle the problems of a pupil and the Local Authority has not got a viable alternative placement to offer and are effectively stalling and hoping the problem will go away. So the situation becomes immersed into a morass of reports and action plans that involve input from such a large variety of professionals that the plans become meaningless and a technique for keeping the true problem in a kind of limbo.

My dissatisfaction with the external behaviour support team appears to be shared by other schools in the borough. In early February we are informed that the team is being disbanded and the individuals who have been frustrating us in our attempts to support pupils with very challenging behaviour are all

being made redundant. My reaction and that of my colleagues disturbs me but it is a spontaneous reaction and demonstrates some of the tensions and contradictions around the multi-agency input into pupils with BESD problems.

'In a big meeting about an alternative school curriculum when my boss, the assistant head inclusion announced that the behaviour intervention service was going to be all made redundant, what a terrible indictment of 'divide and rule' that many of us in the room, including me, throw up a cheer. We are all teachers but for the last few months I have felt that they have tried to persecute me with their unrealistic demands for behaviour interventions and their obsession with paperwork and hoop jumping. Now for the time being, they have got their come uppance. They will have to find another Local Authority with a behaviour intervention service from which to act as advisors or they will have to practice what they preach and go back into schools and deal with the highly challenging kids themselves. I think these things and it makes me feel bad. The plight of the highly vulnerable behaviour/emotional kids is terrible and one could argue that the removal of a service to champion their cause, cannot be a good thing overall. Maybe, it will be restructured and reinvented in the months to come in some way. But the feelings of frustration bordering on animosity that I know that both myself and many of our colleagues feel for these external gatekeepers is pretty strong. We have always wondered what they know about managing behaviour that between us, as quite a skilled team of teachers, we don't know. And I have always wondered if the advice that they might give is realistic in a large secondary school environment with its many teachers and room changes etc. Without question, even if we don't need their advice, those kids are in desperate need of something beyond and above what we can give them with home based curriculum. As I have said on many occasions before, they can't cope in the mainstream.' (February 2013 journal entry)

10.4 The 'dyslexia' lobby and the pressure it puts on the SENco at Greenfield.

The word Dyslexia can be crudely translated as a specific learning difficulty with one aspect of reading, writing or spelling. There are several hundred pupils at Greenfield School that have a difficulty of this kind. Pupils who are particularly weak are given extra support classes in Years 7 and 8 but there is not enough staffing provision for the SENco to cater for this kind of need in all its manifestations in the school. Some parents are very unwilling to accept this limitation and set out to obtain a special needs statement for their son or daughter as 'dyslexics', even when I have explained to them that they are unlikely to be successful. Dealing with a group of resolute parents takes up a lot of meeting time and leads to a paperwork trail similar to that I have referred to in the earlier section on pupils with emotional/behavioural statements. In Greenfield's Local Education Authority, the process begins by the SENco writing up a Common Assessment Form (CAF). This document is filled in alongside the parents and gathering the required detailed information takes several hours of meeting time. It takes a

further half a day minimum to write it all up. As the SENco at Greenfield, I am lucky that the process is shortened as I am given some administrative support and my CAF forms are typed up in a couple of hours. Collecting background information about family circumstances for the CAF form can be difficult. I have to ask intrusive questions about the family's living conditions and financial arrangements when all I want to do is get the Local Authority to assess the pupil's learning difficulties. Sometimes the nature of the relationships within the family is sensitive and cannot be revealed as it can spoil the co-operation between the parents and the school. The time commitment on completing a CAF is very extensive and it is not something that a SENco wishes to enter into lightly. If the CAF is successful, the first stage of an assessment for a statement of Special Educational Needs involves the educational psychologist and other outside experts coming in to observe the pupil in the classroom and then writing up reports. This also takes a lot of organisation and discussion and is not something that I want to do, unless I feel that the attempt to gain a statement of SEN is a real possibility. But parents of what I will call the 'dyslexic' lobby will not take my advice and insist that we begin these complex and time consuming processes. I have to lose time from partnership teaching and time from my own direct contact with pupils with learning difficulties so that I can begin what usually turns out to be a futile cycle of applications and assessment. The following December 2012 journal entry illustrates the point vividly:

'So it is always the parents who are like a lawyers' lobby that request a statement. They share common traits. Often of higher social economic status they know how to battle with the system. But not all come from privileged economic backgrounds, some are just highly aspirant and the real common trait is a determination not to let the system beat them. In many senses this is admirable, as is their determination to get what they think is best for their children. But they will not accept the fact that the school may be doing everything that it can to support and help their offspring. They want more and they must get it. It doesn't matter how many times I tell them about the statementing process and the relatively high criteria of need that it takes to meet it. It doesn't matter what I tell them about their son or daughter's relative need in comparison to other pupils in the school, who I have to allocate support to first. They press on and insist. You cannot blame them. But it sucks up a lot of my time, meeting them and trying to persuade them to do otherwise. I often feel forced into embarking on a paper trail that I know we cannot win.' (December 2012 journal extract)

10.5 Making inclusion work is more difficult in a secondary school than a primary school.

As I have outlined already in this chapter, working with pupils with SEN for BESD can take up a lot of my time as does dealing with parents who are insistent that their son or daughter should be statemented for dyslexia, even when I know that the strict criteria operated by the Local Authority will lead to paperwork, reports, meetings and failure to achieve their objective. Pupils with SEN, related to their hearing or sight, are also very hard to accommodate properly in a mainstream school. I often find myself thinking that as a theoretical concept inclusion was better designed for the practical

organisation of a primary school than a secondary school like Greenfield, perhaps five times its size. Trying to grapple with problems of getting specialist equipment used properly in every classroom in the school takes up a lot of my time leading to hugely complex micro management for the SENco. The following journal extract demonstrates just how much daily difficulty getting a pupil's hearing device working in every classroom can be:

'I am called over at the end of the day for a parent of one of our hearing impaired pupils. She is making a fuss. Melanie's hearing device for teachers is constantly going wrong and when it does go wrong, it often has to be sent off for months to the manufacturers. She accuses teaching staff of handling it roughly and breaking it. She says that people often won't let Melanie into the classroom where we charge the device at the beginning of the day to pick up the machine.She says that teachers are using videos and other screening devices that Melanie is missing out on because she can't hear them. Presumably, this would be true even if she did have her hearing aid on, as the device only amplifies the sound of the teacher's voice for her.

I assure that we have trained the teachers to use the hearing device.....What I do know is that in a big secondary school with Melanie moving through to ten subjects in ten different places over the course of a week, sensitive hearing equipment has a way of getting broken. Perhaps the use of such equipment in the rough and tumble environment of a secondary school wasn't ever that realistic. Also I know for a fact, Melanie is reaching teenage years, where she doesn't want to wear the equipment and she is embarrassed about being seen with it on. More problems to try and solve. I may be able to solve it for a day yes, for five days in a row – probably - but longer than that, it is likely there will be another incident of somebody who hasn't listened about Melanie not letting her into a room to get her equipment or the machine will go wrong again. There are just so many people that need to know things and remember something small but important things around a pupil in a big mainstream school and somebody always seems not to have listened properly. Those in regular contact with the pupil such as her class teachers sometimes only see her twice in a fortnight. There is no excuse for the core subject teachers to forget as they do at least see her for four hours a week. But this is very different from the model that I suspect special needs inclusion is based on, the one of the primary school and the all day point of contact of one classroom teacher and one teaching assistant and the parent coming up to school at the end of the day to have a few words with that class teacher. The model for inclusion at secondary school doesn't recognise that there are five fold the number of pupils, five fold the number of teachers, five fold the number of pupils with statements and special needs all gathered together in one place. This creates a richness of diversity and opportunity to mix with lots of different personalities. But it also creates flux, movement, difficulty in establishing thorough routines and communication systems. The theme of difference between primary and secondary in real practical terms is an interesting one for this diary and for my research as a whole. You do wonder if anybody thought these things through or have conducted proper research

afterwards about whether they can be made to work.’ (February 2013 journal entry)

10.6 The inspection system and the way it inhibits the work of SENco at Greenfield

One of the key themes in my research has been the way that mainstream teachers feel negative about the performativity agenda and the way that it is monitored by Ofsted. A key finding in the whole school questionnaire was that teachers felt that they spent too much time on preparing for exams and teaching to the test. This was reinforced by the teacher interviews from Lucy, Roy, Robyn and Ursula. I was involved in partnership teaching in two classes that were preparing for GCSE exams and the importance of obtaining higher grades for the pupils was all pervading. Throughout my research, I was consistently given a strong message that gaining high examination results based on computer generated predictions of expected levels of progress was a management priority which was at the heart of the mainstream secondary teacher’s working life. It was much more of a priority for their time than preparing differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties. The journal entries on the eve of our Ofsted inspection in January 2013 brought out some of these issues very sharply. They also showed that these issues pervade my work as a SENco. In the following journal extract, the critical incident highlighted how long it would take mainstream teachers to prepare differentiation fully for their daily lessons. The preparation for the two days of the Ofsted inspection took up many hours of overtime:

‘The teachers have an evening’s notice of the next day inspection. That means burning the mid night oil preparing lessons in great detail and also printing out a written plan and a whole lot of contextual data about their classes. Preparing just one lesson to be watched by a senior manager in a school takes the minimum of a couple of hours of preparation. So for some teachers we are talking about an evening that is going to stretch long into the night. What I found fascinating about the process was that it demonstrated how long it would really take if teachers prepared carefully and in great detail for all of their lessons every day. The two days of the inspection demonstrate that it would be a ridiculous work load if teachers had to do everything properly. Many teachers worked to 10 o’clock at night or later to prepare their lessons and then had to do exactly the same thing again for the second day of the inspection. The length of time everything takes is an accurate indication as to why ‘time to think’ and ‘time to prepare materials and lessons’ presents a problem that the teachers say they face when they filled in their questionnaires. It was the most consistent reason given by teachers as to why they did not differentiate more fully for pupils with special needs. (January 2013 journal entry)

The two days of the Ofsted inspection made a big impression on my understanding of my role as SENco. The priorities that I thought were important such as working closely with the pupils and supporting mainstream teachers in partnership work were not acknowledged in the inspection. The formula for monitoring the school set out Ofsted priorities about how the school should cater for its

pupils with SEN. I had to try to satisfy the inspector's desire for numerical data that measured progress for pupils with complex learning difficulties. My evidence had to satisfy the inspector that my area of responsibility was being dealt with well:

He asked no questions about what we did, how we did it. The focus was on tables and spread sheets. I felt that there was a need for a more in depth analysis of what was going on in the school. Many of my tables which showed progress or rather lack of progress for a pupil with learning difficulties did not show anything like the real picture. I had provided case studies that mixed qualitative and quantitative data but these were not considered. I can see how the external measure of the exam results at 16 shows something about the school but internally generated data is open to a range of problems. In my day to day life as a SENco, I have to relate to pupils and teachers and parents. There isn't much time to keep detailed numeric records, although, I have been thinking for a number of months now about how to present our work and what data is needed to back it up. However my assigned inspector only had ears and eyes for one kind of information. (January 2013 journal entry)

10.7 The Leadership and Management of the learning support assistants.

Over the last twenty years, more and more Learning Support Assistants have been employed in English secondary schools. They are expected to help the mainstream teacher work with pupils with special needs. The assistants provide one- to -one help in lessons and some take groups for literacy or numeracy outside mainstream classes. Blatchford et al. (2012) have conducted extensive research that questions the effectiveness of Learning Support Assistants to differentiate effectively for pupils with learning difficulties. They highlight the fact that the most complex and needy learners should be spending more time having direct contact with the more highly trained subject teacher but often end up receiving questioning and explanations from LSAs who are far less secure in their subject knowledge and skills.

It is not the scope of this research to investigate this directly. However, my critical incident journal spent much time on staff management issues with the learning support team and may make a contribution to the areas that Blatchford et al. have been researching. I set out in this research to evaluate what the SENco can do to support the practice of mainstream teachers with differentiation. As the SENco, there are two important issues. Firstly, the journal shows that the SENco spends a highly significant amount of their non-teaching time in school managing the Learning Support Assistant team that in my school numbered twenty people. Secondly, a SENco such as myself, also has to try to find ways of training the LSAs so that they can make a meaningful contribution to the learning of the pupils whose classes they go into. There is only one SENco and therefore a limit to the amount of partnership teaching which that person can do. The large team of LSAs, if working well, could be the vital link to enriching the practice of mainstream teachers who differentiate for pupils with learning difficulties. Improving the skills of the teaching assistants is therefore an essential strategy for helping teachers

improve differentiation in the mainstream classroom. Improving the quality of the partnership between mainstream teachers and the SENco is at the heart of the SENco's daily work. Yet my own research findings in the last chapter on partnership teaching showed that I found it very hard to make my support of mainstream teachers effective in terms of differentiation, although my role assumes that I am one of the most highly trained and experienced special needs practitioners in the school. If I found it so difficult, it is not surprising that my much less experienced teaching assistants, who do not have the status of the SENco, find partnership with mainstream teachers even more challenging.

10.7.1 LSAs' wish for teacher status.

A substantial minority of the LSA team in the school aspire to become teachers themselves. But the recent recession in the jobs market has blocked this progression route and left many assistants feeling disgruntled with the consequence that it is harder to motivate them in their current role. Available teaching posts are being given to highly qualified graduates from top flight universities and many well qualified graduates are using a temporary Learning Support Assistant position as a stepping stone to becoming a teacher. This is leaving a large part of my work force feeling frustrated in relation to their own career progression. My journal revealed that this frustration can make members of the team hard to motivate. The lack of professional advancement makes managing the learning support assistants a more difficult job for the SENco:

Where does a large proportion of the current teaching assistant team come from? They are recruited through the ranks of meal time supervisors and various clerical staff in the school. That is the school tradition. The pecking order is from teaching assistant onto learning mentor or more recently the role of cover supervisor. In recent years there has been some cross over to the role of graduate training teacher in situ. Some staff that have progressed through this route have been immensely successful and one is currently a head of year. But for this system of patronage and advancement to work smoothly, there have to be gaps and movement amongst the teaching staff. The job market has completely seized up in the last two years and there is next to no movement. The graduate teacher scheme has dried up and the subsidies to schools in certain subjects that went with it. So the school can be more demanding even in areas like Maths and Science, where it has traditionally had difficulties recruiting. Positions are now open to relatively large fields of young and well qualified academic graduates and those on the Teach First training scheme (again with very high academic prowess) and in that situation it is very hard for my learning support staff aspirants to make headway. The opportunities are few and the competition has now become very intense. The feeling of being stuck and stagnating is increasing. As their line manager, I see that frustration and am aware that some of it may be directed towards me in the future. (December 2012 journal entry)

10.7.2 LSAs' relationships with the mainstream teaching staff.

As the SENco, I have found it hard to build the relationships between the teaching assistants and the mainstream staff. Last year, I delivered a whole school training session to encourage the two sets of staff to adopt effective policies for working together, but the session had to be handled carefully because of the latent tensions between the two lobbies as the following journal extract shows:

Today's session went pretty well. The issue of dealing with teaching assistant/teacher relationships with mainstream staff is something that most people in the room have a real stake in, as the show of hands on how many people get support in lessons for more than three times a week demonstrates. But there is capacity when swapping experiences of what works and what hasn't worked quite so well for harsh stories to be exchanged. It would be so easy to get into a polarised 'tit for tat' with teachers versus assistants. I tried to positively frame the discussion and also warned the audience of this danger. Luckily, one of the humanities teachers RW got in early with a very positive plug on how he was lifted the other day by the energy of one of my LSAs coming into his classroom. This set the tone. (January 2012 journal entry)

But tension between the two groups is less serious than the issue of the lack of time they get to work together. The issue of having time to prepare with a colleague has been a recurring issue throughout my research in the questionnaires, interviews and partnership teaching experiences. Teachers' daily timetables seem to be overloaded and leave little time to prepare differentiated materials in the way that they would like. When teachers are not teaching they have to respond to the performativity agenda with its demand to improve exam results and analyse pupil data. They also have to follow up incidents of poor pupil behaviour supervising detentions and making phone calls to parents. On top of all this, some subject teachers have a lot of marking to do. This makes the teachers very tired at the end of the school day and inclined to jealously guard any time that they have to do their own preparation and marking. They do not necessarily want to use this precious time to sit down and liaise closely with a learning support assistant who has worked with them. One of the initiatives that I attempted in the 2012/13 academic year was to link each teaching assistant to a department of their choice. I had hoped to encourage greater planning and preparation between the teachers and the assistants but the following journal extract shows that it did not work in the way I had intended.

My second in charge has come up with a good initiative – to get members of the learning support department into other curriculum areas to help with literacy and materials preparation. It is the missing link that the researchers say does not happen. Why? Because there is no time and no interchange between the staff. My teaching assistants do have the time. They are paid until 4.30 but they often sit around underemployed for the last 45 minutes of the day. So surely it should be very straight forward to get the two parties together working productively? Once you start to probe

down into why things do or do not happen, you start to uncover some very interesting things. The teachers want to go home early, have a rest and start their work later in the evening. Or they want the time after school to prepare lessons and mark on their own. They don't want to spend it planning anything with the assistant. (September 2012 journal entry)

10.8 Overall Conclusions.

My journal extracts have shown the reader the nature of some of my preoccupations during the time that I was working in partnership with five teachers in the classroom. Without doubt, these journal extracts often present situations that detracted from my ability to discuss and prepare lesson materials with the mainstream teachers I was working with. They encouraged me to make the best of impromptu interventions in partner teachers' lessons as a substitute for spending that preparation time together. The reader can tell by the tone of my journal extracts that I felt very angry and frustrated by the way certain issues were absorbing my time and would have preferred to be exercising my own professional efficacy in determining what the most productive priorities should be.

10.9 Chapter summary.

In this chapter I have looked at key themes from my critical incident journal and how they forced priorities on me that were not necessarily the priorities that I wanted for my work as SENco at Greenfield School. The key themes were the time consuming work around behaviourally challenging pupils with a statement of SEN who just could not settle in at Greenfield School. Also the ongoing issues with some parents who were not prepared to accept that their son or daughter's dyslexic difficulties could not attract the additional funding of a SEN statement and coerced me to attempt to get one, when they do not meet Local Authority criteria. I have also demonstrated that trying to meet the external demands of the performativity agenda also took time away from key elements of my job description, especially in a year when we were inspected by Ofsted. The journal also charts on going issues of line managing a very large team of LSAs and their relationships with mainstream teachers.

Chapter 11. Discussion.

11.1 Introduction

In this chapter I set out how the research has addressed the research questions, discuss the findings in relation to the literature that already exists and examine the limitations to my own research. The chapter concludes by considering the implications of the study in relation to policy and practice in English secondary schools in urban areas similar to Greenfield. The research set out to answer the following questions within the context of Greenfield Secondary School: **1.How do mainstream teachers make sense of their role in terms of ‘every teacher is a teacher of special needs’? 2.What constraints do they face? 3. How can the SENco help?**

To answer these questions, initially, I asked staff in a large inner city secondary school to complete a questionnaire. 93 percent of the teachers completed the questionnaire. From this ‘macro’ school level I moved on to explore the issues with a ‘micro’group of volunteer teachers (six interviewees and five partners in teaching). They were able to provide a more in depth perspective on the key issues raised by the larger group. I also analysed my own role as SENco using a critical incident journal for the 2012/2013 academic year.

In this chapter, the findings from the research are grouped in the following way. Data analysis relating to the first two research questions is considered first. The issue of the SENco’s contribution to supporting staff in working children with Special Educational Needs is considered in a separate section.

How do mainstream teachers make sense of their role in terms of ‘every teacher is a teacher of special needs’? What constraints do they face?

11.2 Making sense of the role ‘every teacher is a teacher of special needs.’

As set out in Chapter 1, I have taken ‘making sense’ to mean the daily expectations and routines that mainstream teachers employ to teach pupils in their classes with SEN. The term SEN includes a number of types of difficulties relating to learning and behaviour. They are categorised using commonly labelled definitions such as Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD), Autistic Spectrum Difficulties (ASD) and MLD (Moderate Learning Difficulties). There are of course other categorisations of SEN but these were the main classifications encountered by the mainstream teachers of Greenfield School

11.2.1 Setting the scene with the Questionnaire.

The questionnaire provided an overview of what a large group of teachers in one school felt about their practice with SEN pupils. In the questionnaire, I tried to ascertain how teachers made sense of their role in relation to SEN pupils by asking them directly if they thought they were performing that role well and whether they were comfortable with it. 76.1 percent of them said that they met the needs of their SEN pupils often or always. But a smaller proportion, 63.7 percent felt comfortable or very comfortable with the fact that they were asked to cater for such a wide range of learning needs. These data gave me an initial indication that some teachers had significant reservations about the role that had been asked to perform. There was a degree of ‘anxiety’ and ‘insecurity’ about making sense of the role of being an SEN teacher in the classroom.

The teachers felt the greatest insecurity with pupils with BESD. 50.8 percent of them found that these pupils presented the greatest challenges. The second most challenging special education need identified by the teachers was SLCN with 29.2 percent of teachers indicating that they lacked confidence in teaching these pupils. The difference between responses to working with these groups was over 20 percentage points. I shall investigate this in more detail later in the chapter.

Teachers responding to the questionnaire commonly made sense of their role in terms of daily pedagogic practice by using strategies that were personal and instantaneous. 97 percent said that they frequently used verbal praise to motivate students and over 70 percent used one to one explanations and wrote up key words on a board. In contrast just over 30 percent used strategies that required the preparation of new reading materials in advance of the lesson and only 49.2 percent indicated that they had planned an active relationship with their supporting LSA.

Teachers made sense of their SEN classroom role by finding ways of responding to the needs of SEN pupils despite feeling very short of time. 73.1 percent of them made it clear that they did not have time to plan new materials and 62.7 percent of them believed that they did not have enough time to think about their lessons in advance.

What emerged from the research was that mainstream teachers made sense of their role as SEN teachers in the classroom by adapting their practice and taking account of significant constraints in their working lives. An analysis of the interview and partnership teaching data revealed several themes relating to these constraints. These are set out below.

11.3 The challenge of pupils with BESD

50.4 percent of the teachers responding to the questionnaire reported finding pupils with BESD the most challenging SEN group. The semi structured interviews undertaken with six of the teachers supported

this finding that it was the greatest area of uncertainty and anxiety. Many of the participants felt that the time that they spent trying to anticipate or minimise the effects of a very small minority of pupils in the classroom, took time away from other pupils with speech language and communication difficulties and other literacy difficulties. If the children with SLCN were well behaved and did not challenge the teacher's aim to create a purposeful learning environment in a lesson, then they were often neglected or left to their own devices. The teachers that I interviewed focused on behaviours that disrupted what Hart (2004) described as the 'co-agency' of the lesson – the partnership between teacher and the whole class. The interviews indicated that these teachers did not give much thought to other underlying learning difficulties that the pupil with emotional/behavioural difficulties might have. The prime interest was establishing an effective relationship at an emotional level so that the teacher and their class could work harmoniously together. It was behaviour management strategies that the interviewees discussed as the way to resolve their problems. This was what the teachers chose to talk about when they were asked about situations in which they had handled differentiation successfully or less successfully. It was not an area of their classroom practice that they were comfortable with and so it was often the issue that they chose to talk about. As Garner's research (1995) demonstrated challenging pupils most value teachers who are able to interact with them with a sense of humour, listen to their problems and be accessible. To do that effectively, a teacher needs to feel relaxed within his or herself.

This case study of a single school, Greenfield, confirmed the findings of the NASUWT report on Inclusion (2008). In their report, Ellis et al. made it clear that including pupils with BESD created very powerful areas of tension in the classroom. Teachers were highly anxious about pupils they did not feel they could build reciprocal relationships with. The case study also re-affirmed the findings of the University of Kent research team in their later 2011 report (Ellis et al. 2011) when they pointed out that in their survey of one hundred teachers, a frequent comment was that low level disruption combined with one or two very challenging BESD pupils in the room was something that made them extremely uncomfortable.

Maintaining emotional connection with pupils remained the paramount concern of the teachers. Forming such connections with a pupil with BESD was a very important teaching strategy. This accords with what Coffey (2001) identified. She stated that for all teachers social interaction and communication remained at the heart of their pedagogy. They were aware that other differentiation strategies were also required by school management but the all important teaching tool was emotional connection with pupils. This was an important perspective held by all of the teachers that I interviewed and taught with in partnership. Anxiety about emotional and behavioural negativity was one of the biggest constraints in relation to high quality teaching and encouraged them to be cautious in their practice.

11.4 The challenge to the IRE teaching model.

The teachers made sense of their role as mainstream practitioners by using the IRE pedagogic model for most of their teaching. This was the main model adopted for engaging all pupils - including those with SEN. But there were constraints to the effectiveness of the IRE model, despite the fact that it was the dominant teaching methodology in the classrooms of Greenfield School. In many classes where I partner taught, there were varying difficulties with implementing IRE.

It is a teaching method that places the teacher at the centre of oral interchanges, dominating the way that they develop and are resolved. Rampton and Harris's (2011) research of secondary class rooms in inner urban areas commented on the 'lack of deference' from pupils, who often made the process challenging and tiring for the teacher. Davies (2000) aptly described the typical classroom environment as characterised by 'fragility and constant bubbling (Davies 2000 p.6). I found that that the 'performance' required from teachers to keep the lesson going in IRE mode often made teachers tired. They seemed to prefer staying at the front of the room to better be able to monitor the behaviour of the whole class while they were engaged in a task, rather than going round the room to engage in 'one- to -one' oral differentiation with pupils with SEN. As Fenwick (1998) observed, teaching uses up a lot of energy and classrooms can often be volatile. This makes teachers less likely to risk new pedagogic strategies. They are inhibited about changing their routines and teaching methods in situations where they are not relaxed and feel that they are being fully engaged in classroom management. O'Brien (2003) suggested that teachers need to emerge from their comfort zone and beyond their feeling of well being if they are to improve their inclusive pedagogy for pupils with SEN. I found that teachers did not like to do this, even when they were supported by a member of staff like the SENco. O'Brien's objective may be idealised. It is certainly not one often put into practice. My experience was that teachers needed to be fundamentally at ease and within their comfort zone, teaching from their personal pedagogic strengths, if they were to improve their differentiation practices with pupils with SEN. I have labelled pedagogic strength as 'signature strengths' throughout this research. For example, Roy with his excellent choice of visual images to start a lesson, Robyn with her effective mimicry and story telling skills and Wendy with her ability to seize on controversial issues of gender in the media and capitalise on their significance as learning experiences in media studies or Tony with his highly effective classroom management skills.

11.5 Time constraints.

To make sense of their role of SEN teacher in the classroom, teachers had to acknowledge and adapt to significant time constraints. These constraints were perhaps the most critical factor restricting mainstream teachers from improving their differentiation skills. When asked in the questionnaire, what constrained them from differentiating better, 73.1 percent cited a lack of time to prepare materials. 62.7 percent said that they did not have enough time to plan their lessons. The teachers of Greenfield were

no different from other English secondary teachers in that they had very heavy teaching timetables that did not leave them with much non-contact time. A common teaching load at the school was twenty one out of twenty five hours, 84 percent contact in a school day. Heads of Department had slightly reduced timetables with 76 percent classroom contact but they also had heavy administrative loads. Many of the interviewees mentioned time constraint as a key problem. Interviewees such as Roy and Lucy stressed that the limited amount of non-contact time was often taken up with activities which they did not consider improved their teaching of any pupils, let alone the ones with learning difficulties. This was where issues of performativity, considered so central to the management and improvement of secondary schools, acted as a significant constraint.

11.6 Instantaneous differentiation.

The strategies that the teachers used more frequently were ones that could be implemented spontaneously and without preparation in advance. Strategies such as one-to-one pupil explanations, positive reinforcement through praise, writing key words on the board, using visual images and telling stories to illustrate a lesson objective. However, I found that the results of the questionnaire exaggerated the amount of time that teachers thought they spent implementing such strategies. The five teacher partners did not engage as frequently in the variety of instantaneous differentiation as the questionnaire responses had led me to expect.

The Wyatt model of differentiation (2000) that I had favoured as providing a comprehensive summary of the skills teachers should be using in the literature review in Chapter 2 was not easily replicated in the secondary classroom. Teachers, typically, did not differentiate by creating new resources. They also did not move around the room on a frequent enough basis for one-to-one contact to be sufficient to enable effective differentiation through pace of learning or through interaction with individual or small groups of pupils. When I worked in partnership with five of the teachers, I found that they used a few instantaneous differentiation strategies well but neglected to use many others, even though they could have been applied easily. The questionnaire asked the whole staff to identify teaching techniques that they could use well in the classroom without significant prior preparation. Overall, teaching staff claimed very high usage rates of motivational verbal praise (97 percent often or always), over 70 percent claimed to give one-to-one explanations, writing key words on the board and deploying pictures and visual stimuli. I found that the five teachers who I partnered in teaching adopted the majority of these strategies infrequently, in comparison to the highly positive claims which emerged from the staff questionnaire. Yet these teacher partners were consistently graded good or outstanding by both Ofsted and senior leadership team members who monitored their lessons. Clearly there was a discrepancy between what happened in the classroom on an every day basis and what was displayed when external monitoring occurred.

11.7 Teacher training and CPD.

At all of the levels that I collected data, mainstream teachers were not wholly satisfied with the training that they had been offered to improve their SEN practice. When asked about these issues in the whole school questionnaire, 67.2 percent said that college training had been satisfactory or better and 77.7 percent said that subsequent school based training had been satisfactory or better. However, the six interviewees' qualitative feedback on this matter suggested that there were reservations about the effectiveness of training in actually changing practice. This further corroborated earlier research by Avramides (2000). His survey asked mainstream teachers if they looked at official documentation and film footage introduced by the Department for Education to help them improve their teaching of pupils with SEN. He found that very few made time for such an activity and were highly sceptical of reading or watching information on a screen as a means of helping them improve their practice. They did not think that such help reflected the practical difficulties of their daily classroom life and therefore only offered artificial solutions to their pedagogic problems.

Ellis et al. (2008) drew similar conclusions from their surveys. They found that teachers wanted to build expertise by sharing experiences with their peers. They suggested that to feel more comfortable and effective in their role as teachers of SEN, they needed to increase their confidence and competence in an independent way and develop self efficacy in relation to how they became more skilled. Teachers wanted to feel good about themselves as professionals and self confident enough to develop their own professional practice. The Greenfield interviewees re-affirmed that this style of training was most desired. Tony represented this view well when he said that he could only learn from practical scenarios in his own classroom. Lucy did not want to be given a list of things to read, she needed to see somebody she was working with modelling strategies in front of her in the classroom. Roy was certain he learned how to improve his pedagogy when he worked directly alongside another teacher in the classroom or when he had the time to engage in dialogue with other teachers. The interviewees did not like being subjected to lectures on training days by an outside expert. They preferred to discuss problems as they arose in the classroom. Roy stressed that this kind of professional dialogue at Greenfield was usually brief, informal and often rather rushed. Time was not made available in the formal timetabled day to do this. Roy saw a need for quality time planned for as part of the teacher's life. Otherwise it would be relegated to the end of the working day when teachers were tired from a full day's teaching and wanted to go home.

11.8 The impact of the performativity agenda.

To make sense of their roles as teachers of SEN, interviewees had to learn how to accommodate the

demands of the performativity agenda. This featured as a major inhibitor to mainstream teacher's ability to improve the planning of their lessons for pupils with SEN. There was a strong sense from the questionnaire responses, the interviews and also the experiences that I had during the partnership teaching that teachers used the little non-contact time that was available to them fulfilling expectations placed on them by senior school managers via their heads of department. The interviewees considered the school to be running what they perceived to be somewhat artificial school improvement programmes to improve the quality of their teaching. This consisted of much monitoring and lesson observation to ensure that they were using pedagogic strategies that the school wanted them to use. Implicit to this performativity programme was the use of data about the pupils, which senior management would deploy to set out expectations of what they could achieve in public examinations. The small group of teachers I worked with and the majority of Greenfield teachers that I surveyed with the questionnaire, felt highly pressured by this. It was clear that they did not necessarily disagree with the school's ambition to improve the quality of their teaching but wished to have a more creative and autonomous role in determining how this should be achieved. They wanted more control over the limited time that was available to them in their working lives to organise themselves. Ball (1997), in a case study in a similar large secondary school, found that teachers complained that the many tasks that they were asked to fulfil to support the process of teaching and learning did not make them feel that they were improving their actual teaching but rather were wasting time with unproductive administration. Yandell's research (2012) also indicated that teachers were often giving their managers what they wanted to see in the classroom rather than what they thought was the essence of good teaching. My research findings echo what Yandell (2012) illustrated. Teachers felt disempowered about themselves as professionals and felt that they had to prioritise a monitored agenda created by Ofsted and their own school management teams. At best, this took away precious time in an unproductive way. At its worst, as Roy pointed out, a bad inspection grade could initiate the beginnings of capability proceedings and a threat to a teacher's professional livelihood. Teachers that I interviewed and worked with corroborated what Yandell outlined; a sense that teaching was a profession that was too complex to measure lesson by lesson as desired by the school performance agenda. It was a complex activity that only yielded significant results over much longer periods of time.

Davies (2000) described the cheating and deception that had become part of school culture, outlining the way attendance, coursework and exclusion figures were manipulated to improve a school's standing in the league tables. Two of the six teachers I interviewed went into some detail about the way they felt they had to hide things and use deception to protect themselves. One of the biggest challenges of their daily working lives was having to pretend to be keeping up with a volume of formal marking and assessment that was physically impossible without extending the day to unreasonable working hours. Roy described vividly how he felt he would be disciplined one day for not having recently marked one of his many sets of Religious Studies books as like sitting on a ticking time bomb. Lucy mentioned how she had concealed unmarked exercise books in the boot of a car. These examples highlighted

feelings of guilt that staff felt when they could not keep up with the work load. Clearly, the interviewees thought that they had to resort to deception and ‘cheating’ when the pressure of work expectations was unmanageable. I sensed a major constraint to inclusive SEN practice in the classroom was the reality of teachers learning to ‘duck and dive’ to please others higher in the school hierarchy in relation to marking, planning and delivering teaching initiatives.

Overall, I concluded that although my research question had asked mainstream teachers how they made sense of their inclusive responsibility to meet the needs of pupils with SEN in the classroom, they gave me information about general constraints that applied to teaching pupils of all abilities, for instance the performativity agenda and the pressure of time. They found it difficult to distinguish in their minds any particular SEN groups of pupils beyond those with BESD. In selecting this group, they were prone to label pupils as exclusively BESD, when many of those pupils also had overlapping learning difficulties such as Specific Learning Difficulty (SPLD) or Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) underpinning their BESD. This is a topic to which I will return later in this chapter.

In order to make sense of their SEN role, teachers wanted training experiences that developed their practice and engendered a feeling of self efficacy for working with all pupils and not just those with learning difficulties.

11.9 Research question 3: How can the SENco help?

The third research question involved me analysing my role as SENco through the use of a critical incident journal as well as through partnership teaching during the 2012/13 academic year.

I decided on my rationale for looking at my impact as SENco on the practice of mainstream teachers by firstly asking the whole staff in September 2012 by means of a questionnaire to select what kind of support they would find most useful to improve their classroom practice with pupils with SEN. 40.9 percent selected partnership teaching with the SENco as the most desired way of improving their skills. This was most the popular choice with only 30 percent of staff opting for a day off timetable to prepare new materials for SEN pupils. When asked on the questionnaire what kinds pedagogic strategies they wanted to improve, 71.6 percent of teachers said they want training on preparing materials for poor teenage readers and 44.8 percent wanted to learn how to work more effectively with learning support assistants in class. These were both areas of expertise for the SENco. In addition, spending some of my time working with teachers, was within my power to enact, whereas other options would have required structured changes to the school’s allocation of time for all staff, a change that could only be enacted by the head teacher.

11.9.1 The SENco's dilemma of competing roles.

In earlier chapters I analysed the partnership teaching and the critical incident journal and identified themes concerning the constraints of the school SENco's role that had been raised in previous studies. Petersen (2011) outlined the competing claims on the SENCo's time including being available to advise and support mainstream staff on their SEN practice whilst at the same time administering the heavily bureaucratic Code of Practice and also teaching as a mainstream teacher. My detailed study of my working day as SENco echoed what Kearns (2005) described as the multiple and competing roles of SENco as auditor, mediator, collaborator and rescuer. Cole's theme (2005) that SENcos were constrained by a large volume of paperwork and constantly anxious as to whether the needs of behaviourally and emotionally challenging pupils could be met in the mainstream was also reflected in my findings.

My partnership experiences and critical incident journal illustrated all these previously researched issues and highlighted their significance and interconnectivity. My partnership work in the classroom considered ways in which the SENco and a sample of mainstream teachers could work on practical strategies to improve practice. My research suggested a model of effective practice between the two parties but also highlighted that time to work together was limited and changing the practice of other professionals was hard.

11.9.2 The Challenge of the BESD pupil to the SENco's time.

Earlier studies such as that of Ellis et al. (2008) identified mainstream teachers pre-occupation with pupils with BESD. My own research showed that this was indeed the case. During the interviews, I showed that when asked to give an example of when a teacher felt that they had succeeded or failed in working with children with SEN, they invariably gave examples of pupils with BESD. My research also revealed that these children were also a constraint in relation to the role of the SENco. During the 2012/13 academic year, my critical incident journal tracked a regular cycle of multi agency meetings and complex repetitive paperwork related to two pupils with statements for BESD. The mainstream teachers felt most challenged in their ability to cater for this kind of SEN and as SENco, my biggest constraint in finding more time to support and advise teachers on good practice was the time I had to allocate to this very small group of pupils. Not only were the mainstream teachers often neglecting to differentiate well for pupils who had language and literacy difficulties if they did not pose an immediate problem to the behaviour of the class but I too, was not prioritising their needs as the SENco. In addition, I was invariably failing to convey the vital message that the BESD pupils also had underlying learning difficulties often related to language and literacy themselves. The symptoms of the pupils' disaffection, which had led to them being given the label BESD, had been created by their own emotional reaction to their other learning difficulties. I found that my work as SENco was restricted by the fact that teachers found it difficult to see beyond the emotional challenge presented by BESD pupils.

I also found the head teacher asking me to divert other Learning Support Assistant time to pupils with BESD if their regular support was absent from school. This meant taking staffing away from other pupils with significant language and literacy difficulties on a temporary basis, if their behaviour was unproblematic.

11.9.3 The SENco's management role of teaching assistants.

A key constraint to my support for mainstream teachers as the SENco lay in my role as manager of a large team of para-professionals – twenty LSAs in Greenfield's Special Needs Department. Other researchers such as Cole (2005), Petersen (2011) and Rosen Webb (2012) have highlighted the increasingly managerial role of the SENco. My research highlighted the detail of just how complex the daily routine and management of staff can be, for example, the issue of career progression for existing teaching assistants and some of the frustration that a sense of career inertia and lack of progression can bring. The time spent managing these complex personnel issues limited the time I had to support mainstream teachers with their SEN differentiation.

11.9.4 The restrictive role of the inspection agenda.

Much time was spent in the early part of 2012/13 preparing for an Ofsted inspection. My experience of the inspection itself and trying to work out how to satisfy the SEN Inspector mirrored the fears of the mainstream teachers. So much of my working life like those of mainstream colleagues was open to the judgement of these outsiders. Their agenda dominated my own sense of how I should carry out my professional role. They were external forces whose expectations had to be met. This process diverted time from what I judged to be the more productive processes of working in the school.

11.9.5 The complexity of secondary school organisation.

My critical incident journal highlighted some of the practical difficulties of implementing SEN support in a large secondary school, which inevitably has a very complex organisational structure. I have illustrated how difficult and time consuming it was for a SENco to put programmes of support in place for pupils which involved large numbers of teachers and other professionals, with the sheer volume of participating people often limiting the success of those interventions. It also highlighted how difficult it was for the SENco to support mainstream teachers effectively as they tried to make sense of their classroom responsibility for pupils with SEN because of the lack of mutual planning time. More studies

are needed examining the difference between the primary and secondary school SENco role. Many past studies have been cross phase. I believe there needs to be more research into the differing constraints for the SENco's support of mainstream teachers in these two very different settings.

11.9 .6 To what extent can the SENco influence mainstream practice?

In relation to the research question of how the SENco can help mainstream teachers make more sense of their role as SEN practitioners, I found that teachers were eager to have in class support from the SENco and considered it a highly useful form of training. However, in practice, the interactions that I had with the five teachers who I worked with operated in a more restricted way on a weekly basis than I had anticipated would be the case. There was little advanced planning and preparation undertaken together because of the time constraints on both parties. The teachers were willing to change their differentiation practices but tended to do so in small incremental ways, building on techniques which they are already had an affinity with; the kind of things that I described earlier in this research as their 'signature strengths'. Instead of planning in advanced together, we often differentiated with spontaneous on the spot oral work. We created a 'double act' with the mainstream teacher and the SENco providing each other with arguments for and against certain intellectual positions and swapping stories and narratives from our own lives. The classes engaged with the dialogues and they helped highlight key issues from the topics we were teaching. The SENco took on the role of critical friend to the mainstream teacher, finding ways to explore material that they had introduced from spontaneous new angles so that learning was reinforced and developed.

As the SENco, I tried to model both oral and written differentiation strategies that I thought the mainstream teachers might implement themselves, in particular, producing simple written materials which would be useful to pupils with low reading ages. I also demonstrated how teachers could differentiate 'on the spot' by moving around the room and using different levels of language to reframe questions and explanations in one- to- one interactions with pupils. I found that my mainstream teaching partners were reluctant to copy such strategies because they appeared to be tired from their own whole class teaching. Further research would be useful into the problems that Rampton and Harris. (2011) have described with the IRE model of teaching and the non deferential response that it receives from many pupils in inner city secondary schools around the country. It is possible that factors such as tiredness and loss of energy significantly inhibit teachers from moving around the class room and entering into differentiated one- to- one dialogues with pupils as the school day progresses.

11.10 Limitations of the research

It is important to recognise that the findings of my study, although thought provoking, are restricted by the limitations imposed by myself being a sole teacher researcher, engaged in analyzing a problem in

just one school. Whilst my findings may well have resonance with practitioners from other similar schools, my study is bounded by the fact that it is very small in scale. This needs particular consideration when the reader considers my own highly personal critical incident journal reflecting on my role as SENco at Greenfield. The issues that I have chosen to highlight as limiting my role as a SENco might have been chosen very differently by other SENcos in different working environments. It is also quite possible that other SENcos would have put far less stress on their own role in improving SEN classroom practice for mainstream teachers. I took this one aspect of my job description and decided to prioritise it over all other parts for the sake of the research.

My relationship with mainstream teachers in the partnership teaching in the 2012/13 academic year at Greenfield may well have developed in a very personal way leading to conclusions about sharing practice that might have been very different from other SENcos who might undertake the same kind of research in the future. I found that there was little time to share teaching practices and therefore did not insist that the mainstream teacher and myself planned together in advance. Instead, I developed the role of instantaneous differentiation in class with a stress on SENco and mainstream teacher learning how to work together spontaneously. This approach to the problem of time shortage, is highly relevant but by no means likely to be a universal approach which would be adopted by other SENco colleagues.

Ultimately, the research of just one teacher in one secondary school is always going to have significant weaknesses as well as strengths. The research was also conducted at a particular historical point in time when educational policy has encouraged the practice of including a wide variety of pupils with SEN in the mainstream, whilst at the same time pressurising schools to improve examination results. There has often been tension between these two agendas as the high intensity differentiation strategies required to support pupils with SEN conflict with time needed to enhance academic performance, particularly of pupils who are at the borderline of meeting nationally required standards, for instance, raising grades from D to a C in subjects such as maths and English.

11.11 Implications of this study for policy and practice

11.11.1 Categorisation of SEN pupils on school computer information systems.

The findings showed that teachers paid much attention to one categorisation of SEN, that of BESD. It may be that they are encouraged to do this by the way that data is presented to them about all types of SEN. This information is commonly drawn from a software package called School Information and Management Systems (SIMS). This is the system in operation in thousands of schools in the UK. When the SENco enters data on pupils' learning difficulties, it is impossible to enter more than one definition of a pupil's SEN. Consequently, when teachers draw information from SIMS, they are encouraged to focus on SEN as one or another explicit type of SEN rather than the more likely reality that a multitude

of difficulties are present at the same time. BESD is the category that most teachers tend to focus on and they often fail to investigate the more detailed SEN information that describes a more complex set of underlying learning difficulties that could also have been labelled as Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) or Specific Learning Difficulties (SPLD). The research reported here has highlighted how teachers are drawn to BESD as the dominant category and dealing with its challenges absorbs their time. As the SENco, any challenge that absorbs the mainstream teachers' time quickly becomes one that will absorb the time of the SENco, who is often charged with solving the problems of the most challenging BESD pupils in the school or moving them on to alternative provision.

More research is needed on the impact of commercial school information systems and the way that they encourage an over simplification of SEN which may be unhelpful in encouraging teachers, already short of planning time, to differentiate in a more varied way.

11.11.2 The integration of pupils categorised as BESD

The pressure that their behaviour brings to the system often led both the mainstream teachers and myself, the school SENco, to forget that these pupils were also likely to have significant learning difficulties relating to literacy and speech and language communication. I found it difficult to be the advocate for these pupils and their SEN. I felt much sympathy for teachers who were expected to deal with the challenge of managing their behaviour. I felt great frustration that so much of my working day was spent in an endless series of meetings about them, with the local authority trying to avoid finding them special school placements because of the potential expense of doing so. I believe that further research is needed into the issue of maintaining the place of some BESD pupils in mainstream schooling. Whilst, the policy of educational inclusion clearly supports many pupils with SEN in relation to their educational and social development, there is much evidence from this case study alone to suggest that some pupils with challenging behaviour cannot have their needs met effectively in the mainstream classroom. Attempting to do so de-stabilises the work of many mainstream teachers and takes up much of the SENco's administrative time.

There has been no significant change in the dilemmas that Garner (1995) outlined when he stated that disruptive pupils would always be seen as a threat to mainstream teachers, and even more so when there is pressure to raise academic standards as assessed through formal examinations. Garner (1995) warned that excluding pupils to off site units was not necessarily good for the BESD pupils themselves, however much the teachers wished it as a solution. They were often poorly resourced and run down and were likely to further lower the self – esteem of this vulnerable group. It seems that little has changed since 1995. Further research is needed into what prompts the strong feelings and attitudes of

mainstream teachers towards pupils with BESD. The experience of my research would suggest that teachers need more training in this area although the evidence from the questionnaire did not reveal any great desire for it. Only six percent of the teachers stated that they wanted more training on dealing with praise and motivational strategies. However, it is possible that a different wording to the question that had included the word 'BESD' might have elicited a significantly different response.

The volatility and vulnerability of certain pupils with BESD suggested to me that the mainstream schools are too large and complex for some young people to be able to settle into successfully. Even when careful support helps them connect effectively with the majority of the teachers most of the time, they still find it hard to survive in the mainstream school environment. As my interviews and critical incident journal illustrated, it only takes one clash with a teacher for them to revert to dangerously high levels of confrontation that pose a health and safety threat to the rest of the school community. As the research has shown, I found it very hard, as the SENco, to set up interventions for BESD pupils that did not involve multiple personnel. It was also difficult to maintain consistency. Garner and Groom (2010) urge SENcos to play a key strategic role in helping the mainstream staff understand what they term the complexities and dilemmas of BESD as an aspect of SEN. They also believe that the SENco must take a lead in encouraging schools to adopt innovative pedagogies that involve alternative curricula for this group of pupils. This seems like a highly productive way forward but one which it is difficult for the SENco to fit into the daily demands on their time. It is also a development in which the SENco would need the backing and support of an innovative head teacher.

11.11.3 Paperwork and bureaucracy

The problem of paperwork and bureaucracy around all types of SEN has major implications for a SENco's ability to work with teachers on improving their differentiation. The future, as of writing this thesis, was as yet unclear. The SEN Code of Practice was changing and statementing will be revised and re-branded in significant ways. But the assessment process that initiates SEN interventions, the Common Assessment Form (CAF) remains in place. Completing this multi agency assessment tool has always been time consuming. The detailed assessment has had profound effects on the working lives of educational professionals such as the SENco and reduced the time for practical pupil interventions.

11.11.4 Implications for teacher training

The teachers who responded to the questionnaire were not wholly satisfied with their SEN training. 31 percent of the questionnaire sample said that their initial teacher training was unsatisfactory in this respect and 14.9 percent said that the CPD on offer was unsatisfactory. Only 19 percent graded initial

training as good or very good and 24 percent for ongoing CPD. The six interviewees strongly reflected these data with much negativity towards the training that they had received.

The findings suggest that initial teacher education should try and adopt more practical approaches to helping students prepare for teaching children with SEN. For example, some of the trainee teachers at Greenfield had been given a practical project to complete by their trainers. They were asked to identify a student with SEN and research their learning difficulties by going to the SENco and looking at pupil records. Subsequently, the trainee teacher was asked to observe that pupil in class and plan some teaching materials for a short intervention with them. While this may have been useful in some respects it did not prepare the trainees for the difficult behaviour that they may encounter in the classroom from pupils with BESD. Of course, it is difficult to provide trainee teachers with a solid grounding in working with students with SEN as SEN training lends itself to combining theory and practice. The newly training teacher might absorb the theory relating to SEN pupils but not necessarily have the immediate self assurance to attempt to put that theory into practice. This requires self-confidence and the kind of self-efficacy mentioned by Ellis et al. (2008) in their research about what teachers wanted from their training. This is acquired through having extensive classroom experience.

The research reported here indicates that it might be better to provide teachers with further practical training in working with children with SEN when they have completed a period of time in their first teaching position. At that point in time they might have sufficient experience to be more able to assimilate a mixture of theory and practice. The responses to the questionnaire and interviews pointed to the need to give mainstream teachers practical support from the SENco after they have developed a range of teaching strategies and are broadly confident with their classroom practice but are perhaps not too established into well worked routines which they might find hard to change. The findings suggest that individually tailored in service training which builds on teachers' existing strengths will be more effective than an attempt to train all the teachers in a department or a whole school on a training day. Training needs for staff need the same individual differentiation as for the pupils.

11.11.5 Implications for the SENco and mainstream teachers.

What would the ideal SENco role be like if they were to support mainstream teachers more effectively? The findings of the research show that it is difficult for the SENco to distance themselves from what Kearns (2005) described as the multiple role conflict of acting as auditor of the SEN Code of Practice, rescuer for pupils in danger of exclusion and regular collaborator for teachers wanting to improve their practice. The research reported here highlighted the role of collaborator. I have concluded from it, that if the class teacher's role as a teacher of pupils with SEN is to be improved this should be the most important role for the SENco. The SENco should be focusing on the ways that departments build SEN strategies into their schemes of work and encouraging a school to give more time to mainstream

departments to develop new materials for pupils with lower reading ages. The SENco should be at the forefront of pedagogical discussions about how to promote a variety of instantaneous differentiation strategies in the classroom. The SENco might also spend significant periods of time producing new differentiated materials for mainstream teachers who are too short of time to do it themselves. As a SENco, I have also tried to put pressure on commercial companies to create more materials which take account of pupils with low reading ages as it is clear that there is a shortage of time in the working day for teachers to produce enough of those materials themselves.

11.12 Conclusions: key research findings and their implications for my own practice.

The responses to the questionnaire indicated that the majority of teachers perceived that they:

- extensively use praise in their classrooms;
- used one-to one explanations;
- wrote key words on the board;
- did not have time to develop materials for pupils with SEN;
- did not have time to think about their lessons in advance;
- did not adopt strategies that required the preparation of new reading materials in advance of the lesson;
- did not plan their work with the supporting LSA;
- wanted to have the SENco work alongside them in the classroom;
- wanted to learn more about creating reading materials with low reading ages;
- were not frightened to try out new teaching methods in the classroom.

Teachers are short of time to plan specific differentiation strategies for pupils with SEN. This became apparent from the partnership teaching. The research has established that through partnership teaching SENco/ teacher relationships can be enhanced and teachers be supported to develop more effective differentiation strategies. Critical to this was a partnership where the professionals questioned each other and sought to engage pupils through combined dialogue. This was a relationship that evolved as trust and familiarity developed. The interactions relied on spontaneous differentiation with very little pre-planning. The mainstream teacher remained the key leader of the lesson, with the SENco taking a subordinate role. However to gain credibility, the SENco had to find ways of leading the lesson on some occasions, whatever the subject discipline.

The SENco provided support by modelling practices which encouraged the teacher to build on the best of their own pedagogy, something which I have termed their ‘signature strengths’. However, I also tried to model a key differentiation strategy, that of going around the class and questioning pupils one-

to-one. I found that the mainstream teacher tended to be reluctant to engage with this. I ascribed this to the fatigue that came from performing in front of the class in the earlier part of the lesson and engaging in the pedagogic practice of IRE.

The research showed that BESD dominated the thinking of most teachers in relation to SEN. When asked to talk about SEN, teachers invariably focused on BESD. The research indicated that teachers needed to have emotional connectivity with the whole class to maintain motivation and a positive learning environment. Children with BESD disrupted this by providing an alternative focus for pupils' attention which challenged that of the teacher. Teachers were constantly aware of the importance of their inter-personal skills and the need to maintain good relationships with pupils to create a positive learning environment. The challenges of being a teacher of all children including those with SEN require teachers to develop very high level interpersonal skills. Currently available CPD opportunities may be insufficient to meet this need. From the SENco perspective, a very small number of BESD pupils take up a disproportionate amount of time, reducing that available for supporting teachers in developing differentiation strategies for children who have learning difficulties, but are not presenting with BESD. The research of Jennings et al. (2011) into how teachers could improve their social and emotional resilience in the classroom when faced with students with challenging behaviour is an example of a potentially useful training model. Jennings et al. (2011) described the 'burnout cascade' that can develop when teachers become hostile and punitive towards their pupils after long periods of disruption in class. They found that teachers from inner city schools such as Greenfield benefited by the training on strategies that Jennings et al. (2011) termed developing 'mindfulness' and helped them stay more emotionally aware of both their own needs and vulnerabilities as well as those of the pupils.

In terms of my own personal practice as SENco, the findings on BESD will encourage me to stress the overlapping nature of SEN so that teachers do not prioritise the sole category definition given on the computer data systems. Given that BESD predominates as a focus for teachers, I will draw attention to other types of learning difficulties such as SPLD and SLCN and remind staff that it is these problems that are often the root cause of the BESD and need important remedial work.

In terms of partnership teaching, I will reflect on how I might change the model that I used during the research. I intend to pilot shorter periods of partnership teaching with teachers who are completely new to the profession, such as those trained through Teach First, or colleagues in their first year of teaching after completing a PGCE and evaluate how effective such interactions can be.

In my first chapter I described how one of the key stimulus for my research was examining my own practice as an action researcher. The way I chose to do that was clearly highly personal and remained so throughout the PhD process. I saw research as a way of establishing my professional identity in a climate where the external school improvement agenda has often felt very coercive in directing and controlling my professional life. The research has been a reliable way for me to keep a degree of

independence as to how I develop my own understanding of my role as SENco and my ability to influence the practice of mainstream teachers. It has become my private space, almost my secret place, to reflect on my own practice and that of those around me.

My research has never been neat and has followed a typical 'zig zag' process that McNiff (2002) describes as a process of constant review and re-adjustment. My final conclusions are written to present a coherent argument but the underlying reality of the themes that I outline are often messier and less coherent than the final written form would suggest. But the action research process has helped me make sense of my own life at Greenfield School. It has made me more aware of my own value systems. In particular, the right of a teacher to develop their own practice in their own way rather than respond to standardised management directives. I have learned from my interviews and partnership teaching that many fellow professionals also wish to develop their own self-efficacy when it comes to improving their own practice. It often appears that as soon as one theme or theory has been laid bare by action research, then another one is hinted at or suggested. It is hard to put a full stop on my research questions. As McNiff (2002) states:

'There is no end, and that is the nature of developmental practices, and part of the joy of doing action research. It resists closure. Each ending is a new beginning.' (McNiff 2002,p.16)

References

Ainscow,M. (1999) *Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools*. London: Falmer Press.

Ainscow,M. (2000) The next step in special education: supporting the development of inclusion practices; *British Journal of Special Education* 27(2) 2000 pp 76-80

Avramides,E.,Bayliss,P. and Burden,R. (2000) A survey into mainstream teacher attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school in one Local Education Authority. *Educational Psychology* 20(2) pp 191-211

Ball,S.J. (1997) Good School/bad school. Paradox and fabrication. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 18(3) pp317–326

Barber,M. (1996) *The Learning Game. Arguments for an Education Revolution*. London:Victor Gollancz.

Blatchford,P., Russell,A. and Webster,R. (2012) *Reassessing the Impact of Teaching Assistants: How Research challenges Practice and Policy*. Oxford:Routledge.

Blum,P. (2002) *Improving Low Reading Ages in the Secondary School*. London:Routledge.

Blum,P. (2006 second edition 1997) *Surviving and Succeeding in Difficult Classrooms*. Oxford:Routledge.

Blum,P. (2007) *The Extraordinary Files*. London:Rising Stars.

Blum,P. (2009) *Anger and Conflict Management Pocketbook*. Hampshire:Teachers Pocket Books.

Blum,P. (2010) *The Matt Merton Mysteries*. London:Rising Stars.

Blum,P. (2012) *Vampires Inc*. London:Rising Stars.

Chitty,C. (2004) *Education Policy in Britain*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Coffey,A. (2001) *Education and Social Change* . Maidenhead:Open University Press.

Cohen,L.and Manion,L. (1994) *Research Methods in Education*. London:Routledge

Cole, B.A. (2005) Mission Impossible? Special Educational Needs, Inclusion and the re-conceptualisation of role of SENco in England and Wales, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 20(3): pp287-307

Cooper,P. and McIntyre,D. (1993) Commonality in teachers' and pupils' perceptions of effective classroom learning. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*,63:pp381–399

Cornwall,J. (2005) *Enabling inclusion: Is the culture of change being responsibly managed ?* In T.,O'Brien (ed) *Enabling Inclusion, Blue Skies Dark Clouds*. London:Optimus.

Coultas,V. (2012) Classroom talk: Are we listening to Teachers' voices? *English in Education* 46 (2) : pp175-190

Davies , N. (2000) *The School Report. Why Britain's Schools Are Failing*. London:Vintage.

- Davis,P. and Florian,L.(2004) *Teaching Strategies and Approaches for Pupils with Special Educational Needs*. London:DfES.
- Dee,L. (2002) Longitudinal Study of Influences on the Decision Making Process during the Transition from School of Twelve Young People with Special Educational Needs. PhD, University of London.
- DES (1999) *The National Curriculum Key Stage 1 and 2*. London:DES.
- DFE (1994) *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN*. London:DFE
- DFE (2011) *Support and aspiration: A new approach to special needs and disability*. London:DFE.
- DFE (2012) *Improving the quality of teaching and leadership*. London:DFE.
- DFES (1997) *Excellence for All Children. Meeting Special Educational Needs*. London:DfES.
- DFES (2001) *SEN Code of Practice*. Nottingham:DfES.
- DFES (2004) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*. London:DfES
- DFES (2004) *Removing Barriers to Achievement. The Government's Strategy for SEN*. Nottingham:DfES.
- Dyson,A. and Hick,P. (2005) *Low Attainment*. In B.Norwich and A.Lewis (eds) *Special Teaching For Special Children. Pedagogies for Inclusion*. pp 192–206. Maidenhead :Open University Press.
- Dyson,A. and Millward,A. (2000) *Schools and Special Needs. Issues of Innovation and Inclusion*. London:Paul Chapman.
- Ellins,J. and Porter, J. (2005) Departmental differences in attitudes to special educational needs in the secondary school. *British Journal of Special Education* 32(4): pp 188-195
- Elliott, J. (1978) What is action research in Schools? *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 10(4): pp 355–357.
- Ellis, C. and Bochner,A. (2000) *Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: researcher as subject*. In M.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd edn), London:Sage.
- Ellis,S., Tod,J. and Graham-Matheson,L.(2008) *Special Educational Needs and Inclusion – Reflection and Renewal*. Birmingham : NASUWT.
- Ellis,S. ,Tod,J. and Graham;Matheson,L. (2011) *Renewal and Reality: Teachers' Experience of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion*. Birmingham :NASUWT
- Fenwick, D.T. (1998) Managing space, energy and self. Junior high school teachers' experiences of classroom management, *Teaching and Teacher Education* 14(6): pp 619 – 632
- Garner,P.(1999) *Pupils with Problems. Rational fears.....radical solutions?* Oxford: Trentham
- Garner,P. (2002) *Goodbye Mr Chips: Special Needs, Inclusive education and the deceit of initial teacher training*. In T, O'Brien (ed) *Enabling Inclusion, Blue Skies Dark Clouds*. London:Optimus.
- Garner,P. and Groom,B. (2010) *Managing Behaviour, Managing The Standards*. In F,Hallett and G,Hallett (eds) *Transforming The Role of The SENco*. Maidenhead:Open University.

- Garner,P.,Hinchcliffe,V.,Sandow,S. (1995) *What Teachers do. Developments in Special Education*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Greenbank,P. (2003) The Role of Values in Educational Research; the case for reflexivity. *British Education Research Journal*, 29(6): pp793 to 799.
- Hammersley,M. and Atkinson,P. (2007) *Ethnography – Principles in practice*. New York:Routledge.
- Hart,S.,Dixon,A.,Drummond,M.J.and McIntyre,D. (2004) *Learning without Limits*. Maidenhead: Open University.
- Hocut, A.M. (1996) Effectiveness of special education: Is placement the critical factor? The Future of Children . *Special Education for Students with Disabilities* 6(1): pp 72 – 102
- Jennings,P., Snowberg,K.,Coccia, M., Greenberg,M. (2011) Improving Classroom Learning Environments by Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education: Results of Two Pilot Studies. *Journal of Classroom Interaction* 46(1) pp37-48
- Kearns,H. (2005) Exploring the experiential learning of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator. *Journal of In-Service Education* , 31(1): pp131- 150
- Lincoln, Y.S., Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Lipsky,M. (1980) *Street Level Bureaucracy. Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York:Russell Sage Foundation.
- Mckernan,J. (1991) *Curriculum Action Research. A Handbook of Methods and Resources For the Reflective Practitioner*. London: Kogan Page.
- McNiff,J. (2002) Action research for professional development. Concise advice for new action researchers at <http://www.jeanmcniff.com.booklet>
- Miller, J. (1995)Trick or Treat? The Autobiography of the Question. *English Quarterly*, 27(3): pp 22-26.
- Morewood, G. (2009) Case Study. Making optimum use of SENCO time. *Curriculum Management Update* May at www.teachingexpertise.com
- Morse, J. and Nichaus,L. (2009) *Mixed Method Design. Principles and Procedures*. California:Left Coast Press.
- National Union of Teachers (2005). *SENco charter. NUT Guidance for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators*. at www.teachers-org/files/activeO/SENCO_CHARTER_2_JE.doc
- Norwich,B. and Lewis,A.(2005) *How specialised is teaching pupils with disabilities and difficulties?* In B.Norwich and A.Lewis (eds) *Special Teaching For Special Children*.
- O'Brien,T. (2005) *Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*. In B.Norwich and A.Lewis (eds) *Special Teaching For Special Children*. Maidenhead:Open University
- Ofsted (1996) *Subject and Standards*. London: Ofsted:HMSO.
- Ofsted. (2010) *The special educational needs and disability review. A statement is not enough*.

Oldham,J. and Radford,J. (2011) Secondary SENco leadership: a universal or a specialist role? *British Journal of Special Education*. 38(3) : pp 126-134.

Petersen,L. (2010) *A National perspective on the Training of Sencos*. In F.Hallet and G.Hallet. (eds) *Transforming the Role of SENco*. Maidenhead:Open University.

Powell,S. and Tod,J.(2004) *A systematic review of how theories explain learning behaviours in school contexts*. London: IoE.

Rampton,B. and Harris,R. (2010) *Change in Urban Classroom Culture action*. In K. Littleton and C.Howe (eds) *Educational Dialogues: Understanding and Promoting Productive Interaction*. Oxford: Routledge

Reid,G. (2005) *Dyslexia* in B.Norwich and A.Lewis (eds) *Special Teaching For Special Children*. Pedagogies for Inclusion. Maidenhead :Open University Press.

Rosen Webb,S. (2011) Nobody tell you how to be a SENco. *British Journal of Special Education*. 38 (4): pp 159 - 167

Ruddock,J. and Hopkins,D. (1985) *Research as a basis for teaching: Reading from the works of Lawrence Stenhouse*. Heinemann:London.

Scruggs, T.E. and Mastropieri,M.A. (1987) *Effective Instruction for Special Education*. Boston: Little Brown.

Smyth,J. and McInerney,P. (2013)Whose side are you on? Advocacy ethnography: some methodological aspects of narrative portraits of disadvantaged young people, in socially critical research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 26 (1) : pp 1-20.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) London :HMSO.

Stake,R. (1985) *Case study*. In J.Nisbet and J.Megarry (eds) *World Year Book of Education 1985: Research, Policy and Practice*. London: Kogan Page.

TDA (2007A) *Professional Standards for Teachers in England: Qualified Teacher Status*. Available at <http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resurces/pdf/standards.qts.pdf>

Teddlie,C. and Tashakkori,A.(2009) *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research*. California: Sage

Tesch,R. (1990) *Qualitative research:analysis types and software tools*. Oxford:Routledge.

Todd,J. (2001) *Enabling inclusion for individuals*. In T.,O'Brien (ed) *Enabling Inclusion: Blue Skies.....Dark Clouds?* London:Optimus.

Tripp,D. (1993) *Critical Incidents in Teaching. Developing Professional Judgement*. Oxford:Routledge.

Warnock,M. (1978) *Special Educational Needs. A brief guide to Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young people*. London: HMSO

Webb,R. , Vulliamy,G.,Hakkinen,K. and Hamalainen,S. (1998) External inspection or school self-evaluation? A comparative analysis of policy and practice in primary schools in England and Finland; *British Educational Research Journal*, 24(5) :pp 539 – 546

Whitehead, J. and McNiff, J. (2006) *Action Research. Living Theory*. London: Sage.

Wigdortz, B. (2012) '*Bash Street Begone*' (Article The Sunday Times 12.8.12). Extract from *How to Succeed Against the Odds: 5 lessons in leadership from the Founder of Teacher First*: London: Short Publishing.

Wyatt, S. (2000) *Handout from Training Session HMI National Literacy Strategy Pilot*. Lambeth and Southwark LEA,

Yandell, J. (2012) What does learning look like? *Education for Liberation -Socialist Teachers Alliance*, 2012 (5): pp .4- 6

Appendix One – Job Description of SENco at Greenfield School.

<i>Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator</i> MPS + TLR 1B + SEN 1	
<i>Responsible to</i>	Headteacher via designated SLT Line Manager
Functional Relationships	<i>All members of the school staff and governing body</i>
External Relations	Relevant Support Agencies Parents and the wider community

MAIN OBJECTIVES

1. To raise achievement and improve educational outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
2. To ensure all legal and statutory requirements for students with SEN are met.
3. To be the strategic lead for high quality SEN provision.

MAIN DUTIES

1. ***Lead the development of curriculum materials to support students with SEN.***
2. ***Maintain an accurate and up to date SEN register***
3. ***Implement the procedures required by the current Code of Practice.***
4. Lead source of professional guidance and training for staff in relation to SEN.
5. Lead on a screening programme for students new to the school whom have, or may have, SEN.
6. Oversee the Individual Education Plan process for students with SEN.

7. Lead the curriculum for students with SEN, including with high-quality innovative schemes of work where appropriate.
 8. Lead and devise the extra-curricular programme for students with SEN, including at break and lunchtime where applicable.
 9. Monitor the performance of staff in the SEN department, including through the Performance Management process.
 10. Monitor the attainment, learning and progress of students with SEN, and to put in place the necessary interventions to raise their achievement.
 11. Support staff in using SEN data to inform their planning.
 12. Monitor the quality of teaching for students with SEN.
 13. Support and ensure the effective deployment of external providers, working in partnership with other agencies.
 14. Liaise closely with other key members of staff in order to maximise the benefit to students with SEN.
 15. Assist the Governing Body in discharging their statutory responsibilities.
 16. Consult, produce and regularly review the Special Educational Needs Department handbook which should state the agreed procedures, practices and aspirations of the Department.
 17. Responsible for all Access Arrangements for examinations.
-
18. Responsible for managing health and safety within the department.
 19. Complete any other reasonable task in line with the main objectives of the post.

Person Specification

Special Educational Needs Coordinator

Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Qualified Teacher Status</i> • First degree
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Evidence of further professional development relevant to the post.</i> • <i>Successful experience of teaching to a high standard in a comprehensive school serving an urban, multi-ethnic community.</i> • <i>Successful experience of curriculum development.</i> • <i>Successful experience of practical strategies for raising achievement.</i> • <i>Experience of supporting staff to improve and develop their classroom practice.</i> • <i>Experience of organising and developing resources successfully to support curriculum development.</i> • <i>Experience of using information about students' prior attainment to inform planning and to set targets.</i> • <i>Experience of organising events and cross-curricular initiatives.</i>

Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Detailed knowledge and understanding of the curriculum for the key areas.</i> • <i>Knowledge of the latest techniques in the teaching of the key area including the use of the Information and Communication Technology.</i> • <i>Knowledge of the National Curriculum requirements for the key areas at Key Stage 3 and 4 and the different accreditation routes available.</i> • <i>Knowledge and understanding of strategies for raising achievement and motivating students.</i> • <i>Knowledge of effective strategies for supporting, developing and maximising the language skills and potential of students whose first language is not English.</i>
Skills/ Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Excellent communication and interpersonal skills.</i> • <i>The ability to develop a team in an open consultative way.</i> • <i>The ability to communicate clearly and well orally and in writing with students, parents, staff and other professionals.</i> • <i>Excellent ICT skills.</i> • <i>The ability to evaluate one's performance and that of other staff.</i> • <i>The ability to respond imaginatively to the challenges of an innovative curriculum and to develop creative approaches to teaching which gain the interest of students.</i> • <i>Ambition for the success of the key area.</i> • <i>A commitment to promoting equality of opportunity in a diverse, multi-ethnic community.</i> • <i>A commitment to life long learning and the promotion of the school as the focal point for the regeneration of the community.</i>

Appendix 2 Survey on Inclusion and Differentiation.

(1) What do you teach?

(2) How long have you been teaching?

(3) Do you feel that you meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties in your class

Always ☐

Often ☐

Occasionally ☐

Never ☐

(4) Do you feel comfortable with the expectation that 'every teacher is a teacher of special needs'?

Very comfortable. ☐

Comfortable. ☐

Questioning of the statement in some circumstances. ☐

Uncomfortable.

☐

(5) How good was the training you received, to work with pupils with learning difficulties during teacher training at college?

Very good

☐

Good

☐

Satisfactory

☐

Un-satisfactory.

☐

(6) In your current school what was the quality of the training for pupils with learning difficulties?

Very good

☐

Good

☐

Satisfactory

☐

Un-satisfactory.

☐

(7) Which of the following types of training would be useful to you?

Please give rank order.1 through to 5.

(1) being the **most** desired and **(5)** the **least** desired. (**2** Quite desired, **3** Neutral, **4** some reservations)

Work in partnership with the SENCO in my classroom on a weekly basis.

☐

A day off timetable as often as possible to prepare teaching materials on my own or with other teachers in the school.

☐

More time given to lesson preparation and differentiation on inset days so I can work on my own or with other teachers at the school.

☐

More practical tips and helpful handouts on different strategies to work with pupils with

learning difficulties.

☐

(8) What types of special educational needs do you find the most challenging to meet?

Mark 1 as the most challenging through to 4 as the least.

Social and Emotional difficulties.

☐

Speech, Language and communication difficulties.

☐

Weak readers and writers.

☐

Pupils on the autistic spectrum.

☐

(9) Which strategies for differentiation for pupils with learning difficulties do you currently use? (please tick the box)

I give one to one explanation and feedback to a pupil with learning difficulties.

Never ☐ rarely ☐ occasionally ☐ often ☐ always ☐

Prepare new materials that are written with a lower reading age.

Never ☐ rarely ☐ occasionally ☐ often ☐ always ☐

Write key words and their meanings on your board.

Never ☐ rarely ☐ occasionally ☐ often ☐ always ☐

Find visual images that help explain the work that you are doing.

Never ☐ rarely ☐ occasionally ☐ often ☐ always ☐

Partnership work with the learning support assistant that gives them an active role with all pupils in the class.

Never ☐ rarely ☐ occasionally ☐ often ☐ always ☐

Arranging small group work, in which pupils of differing abilities work together.

Never ☐ rarely ☐ occasionally ☐ often ☐ always ☐

Use artefacts or other physical props to introduce new topics

Never ☐ rarely ☐ occasionally ☐ often ☐ always ☐

Use verbal praise in the lesson. Noticing what is going well with individual pupils.

Never ☐ rarely ☐ occasionally ☐ often ☐ always ☐

Tell stories using anecdotes of a personal nature to help illustrate a learning objective.

Never ☐ rarely ☐ occasionally ☐ often ☐ always ☐

Use or refer to existing SEN information and practice strategies that the school has provided for you.

Never ☐ rarely ☐ occasionally ☐ often ☐ always ☐

(10) Which of the following strategies would you like to learn to use

better?

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Working with the teaching assistants in my room. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Improving ways of praising and using positive motivation. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Role play. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Use of visual | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Group work. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher one to one questioning and feedback. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Use of anecdotal teacher and pupil talk to bring the topic to life. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Preparing materials that cater for poor teenage readers. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**(11) What obstacles in your working week stop you from
differentiating more?**

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Not enough time to think about my lessons. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Too much time spent on managing behaviour | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not enough time to plan new materials. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Nervousness about trying new strategies. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Too much time spent on marking and assessing. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Too much time involved in other school tasks. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Demands of schemes of work and examination requirements. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

(12) What route did you come into teaching? Tick the correct one.

GTP PGCE Teach First.

Appendix 3. Phd questions for the in depth interviews.

What were your experiences of school? What were your strong points and what did you find hard?

Have you noticed any ways in which that has become replicated in your own teaching?

Why did you go into teaching?

What would you say is your guiding moral philosophy over teaching?

Tell me about your earlier career? Where did you teach? What was it like?

How easy has it been to carry that out in the guiding teaching principles?

Tell me about a critical incident that has helped you learn in practical terms as a teacher?

What are your key issues now for you in terms of your teaching?

When I say the words 'learning difficulties', what do you see in your head? How do you define to make sense.

How do you cope with the expectations made by School/Government that every mainstream class teacher is a teacher of Special needs?

Tell me about an occasion when you have got that just right?

Tell me about an occasion in the classroom when that just hasn't worked out?

What sorts of training have you had at this school or at any time before, to prepare you for working with pupils with learning difficulties?

If I mention some alternative ways of training. Which ones fit in best with what you think that you need?

What are the limitations to you doing what you want with pupils with learning difficulties?

What are the general constraints of your working day?

What are the big joys of what you do?

What do you think I should be spending my time doing as the SENco?

Appendix 4 - Extract from the 2013 Ofsted report on Greenfield.

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average. Students come from a wide range of ethnic groups, with many speaking English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported by school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average.
- A higher proportion of students than is usual join the school at times other than the start of Year

7.

- The proportion of students known to be eligible for additional support through extra government funding, known as the pupil premium, is well above the national average.
- The school accesses additional vocational education for some of its Year 10 and Year 11

Students.

- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

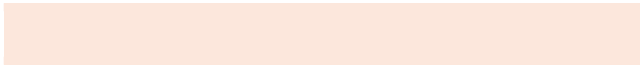
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching across the school by;
 - ensuring all lessons are well planned to match students' individual needs and provide high levels of challenge for all, notably in mathematics
 - checking that all marking is regular and, together with feedback, helps students to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

- Students, including a high number who join the school at various stages throughout the year, often arrive with very low attainment levels when compared to the national average. As a result of good teaching they all make good progress during their time at the school when compared with national figures.
- The Year 11 examination results over the past three years show an upward trend of achievement. In 2012, examination results were broadly in line with the average representing an increase on previous years. All groups of students achieve well, although fewer students exceed typically expected progress in mathematics and Spanish compared to other subjects.
- Observations during the inspection, together with information from the monitoring and tracking system used by the school, indicate that different groups of students make good progress from their starting points. Targeted support provided by teaching assistants, mentors and the work of a 'heritage team', has had a positive impact on the achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, as well as those students supported by additional funding through the pupil premium. Gaps in attainment between this group and other groups of students within the school, as measured by average point scores in national assessments, are narrowing.
- Students from different minority ethnic groups achieve well. This is particularly evident in the recent work

carried out to support Somali students. Support for students who speak English as an additional language is effective in meeting their needs and helping them to develop speaking, listening and writing skills.

- A strength of the school is the promotion of literacy skills. For example, for a small number of students in Years 7 and 9, who each have a statement of special educational needs, the monitoring and progress of their reading levels form the basis for liaison between the English and special educational needs departments. This results in teaching assistants providing supported reading in class, as well as attachment to a bi-lingual 'buddy' and additional lessons, so that literacy acts as the bedrock for engagement with the curriculum and involvement in school life.
- Students displayed good skills in reading, writing and communication in many of the lessons observed. In a Year 8 drama class, students had to perform a role play based on parent/child conflict. Students were seen to listen, negotiate and solve problems in response to challenging situations and then provide feedback, including peer assessment based on the quality of performances.
- In other lessons observed students were aware of what level they were working at what they needed to do to improve. However, the quality of feedback through marking is variable and does not always help students to move on quickly to the next level.
- Where teachers plan to meet individual needs precisely, students make particularly good progress. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson students with a very diverse range of abilities were asked to write a script of a play. They were enthusiastically engaged in activities which were designed specifically for them. As a result, they understood what they had to do, were supported and were able to make rapid progress.
- Vocational provision at local colleges, including courses in construction, hair and beauty and public services, provides some personalised programmes for students whose progress would have otherwise been limited. This ensures that they are prepared well for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- The overall quality of teaching is typically good and there are some examples of outstanding practice. In an outstanding Year 10 physical education lesson, an enthusiastic teacher conveyed high expectations and through a series of key words, a video clip and skilful questioning, kept students fully engaged and motivated. Consequently, they gained a clear understanding of how role models influence participation in sport. They knew how their responses related to different target grades and how they could improve.
- Features of good teaching in the lessons observed included positive working relationships, high expectations, effective target setting and secure subject knowledge. Most teachers carried out frequent checks on whether students understood what they were expected to know.
- Where teaching was less effective, the work set was not always challenging enough to stretch students and ensure that they made the maximum progress.
- Marking and assessment of work do not follow a consistent approach across the school. Some books had evidence of marks linked to grading systems, which were understood and valued by students. Others lacked both marks and advice on how to improve. In some cases, information on students was held on computers and was not always readily available.
- Survey evidence from parents and carers indicates that they consider teaching to be good.
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support and aid the progress of students, notably in literacy, and ongoing training has been a priority for the school.
- Teaching of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is effective in helping them to make good progress, as is support for those entitled to free school meals.



- Students' attitudes in class are consistently good and often exemplary. There is a positive ethos around the school and the highly cohesive community contributes to good behaviour in lessons and around the school. Students consistently show respect to each other and adults.
- Surveys of parents, carers and staff, and discussions with students, confirm the view that behaviour is good overall and that the school is a safe place for learning.
- Students are involved in their learning and are particularly keen to learn when activities are well planned and engaging, such as in physical education, history, physics and music.
- A range of successful strategies and systems have been deployed over time to improve attendance including awards of merits, together with parent liaison. As a result, attendance rates rose and are now in line with the national average.
- Permanent and fixed term exclusions are low. Although an analysis of data revealed that most students excluded are from Black Caribbean and Kurdish/Turkish backgrounds, mentoring, inclusion facilities and programmes for vulnerable groups have been effective in driving down these numbers.
- Students report few instances of bullying, including racist, homophobic or cyber bullying. They say that when this does occur it is dealt with by the school. Students are aware of how to stay safe and benefit from a good quality personal, social and health education programme.

Appendix 5

Roy - Transcript of interview. 20-6-12 and 25-6.12 duration 2 hours

P - Tell me what you liked about your school and what you didn't like about school.

R - Difficult question. Thinking back about it. I don't think I liked school much. I was an introverted character. I was scared. My Dad said that I should just go to school and do what I was told. I didn't want to get the phone call home that said I had not lived up to his expectations, in terms of behaviour. This filled me with fear. I was scared to get into trouble with the teacher because I feared the consequences.

P - So did you ever get into trouble with the teacher?

R - Absolutely not. Looking back at it now, I don't actually think that this was a good thing. It stunted the growth of my personality.

Fear was the biggest control of my behaviour.

P - Fear of your father?

R- No don't get me wrong. It wasn't the case that you know....My Mum and Dad were fantastic parents. My Dad made it clear that I was to behave. The first thing I always said internally was. 'Will I get into trouble for this with my Dad?' I probably didn't experience the things I should have experienced because ultimately I was always fearful that would lead me to a situation where I could get in trouble.

P - Do you think the way you behaved at school affected or has been replicated anyway in your own teaching?

R - Absolutely! The way that I approached school life was to never make mistakes. I was always scared if I did something wrong that I would get into trouble. This kept me more reserved than I could have been. When you are free to express yourself and you make those inevitable mistakes, then you learn from what you do wrong. So I think my attitude probably set me back a bit.

P - You still feel you find it hard to take risks - even now?

R - Not now I don't. As an adult now I love to experience as much as possible. Not just in my professional life. And to make mistakes - so be it. It does inform my teaching practice. One of my mottoes now in the classroom is to encourage people to make mistakes so they can learn from them. I try to encourage my students to do the opposite of what I did.

P - Did you always have that motto as a teacher. Or did you evolve into that motto over the last seven or eight years of teaching?

R- This is the end of the my seventh year. When I trained to be a teacher, that was when I entered into being a fuller grown up adult. I was about 25 at the time. Teaching has made me a much more developed person. Training gave me a level of responsibility that dragged me up into adult hood.

P - ok

R- This idea is still very much in the forefront of my teaching.

P - Why did you actually go into teaching?

R -- Not just one reason. Ultimately I decided that I wanted to become part of a wider organisation . I felt I had a lot to offer. I felt that I could make positive changes . I felt like I had a lot to say rather than a lot to teach.

P - What do you mean 'a lot to say rather than a lot to teach'?

R- I think when I first started off as a teacher , I had a lot to say to kids for how to get the most out of childhood and get to be the most you possible can be. I talked a lot to get that message across. To try and motivate people. But gradually I have found out that the skill of the teacher is to get people to figure it out for themselves. I tried to put that concept into my teaching.

P - What you just said sounds very idealistic. You didn't go into teaching because of finances or because you had really wanted to be a writer or an actor?

R - Totally. It was ideological. I wasn't even aware of the pay structure of a teacher when I got my first job. I had never heard of pay scales or career structure.

P - What is your guiding moral philosophy of teaching? Maybe it has changed a lot.. How would you sum it up?

R- The quality of teaching should be equal for all. That is a very important principle. I believe that one of the main role of a teacher is to inspire their students to learn. Instil this love of learning and self development which they take with them for their entire lives. I despise the idea of meeting targets and deadlines. You sap the energy of these kids with that when what you should be doing is trying to get them into the position when they want to do these things.

P - How is it sapping the energy? Some people would argue it is making the pupils really focus.

R - I would look back on my own education. I felt that I was basically there to meet targets and deadlines. Without actually being able to develop my skills as a student.

P - So that's how you felt?

R- Completely.

P - You have a guiding pedagogical and moral imperative. It stands clear of adult responsibilities . Of getting a flat in Palmers Green.

R - Absolutely.

P - Tell me about your early career. You worked in a school in Sussex?

R- I did my PGCE at Edge hill. Part of Lancaster University. I trained in a school near Liverpool. A place call Ormskirk. I decided to go to a part of the country I had never been to before. I went for interview in East Sussex. Never had been south of London before. I was living in Edinburgh before I did my PGCE. I left university aged 22 and did a few years before I decided to be a teacher. I did some travelling . I set up my own business, importing wine from France. It wasn't that lucrative but it did subsidise the travel.

P - And since the PGCE you have just been teaching?

R Yes.

P - H..... Community College?

R. I was employed as a religious studies and citizenship teacher. I had never done citizenship before. I was quite apprehensive. I was fresh out of PGCE with RE. I did a lot of research and I became a marker for Citizenship to help me really understand what was expected. A year later I became RE co-ordinator. Then I became Head of RE a year later. I did it for a year before moving here.

P - Your reason for moving here? You sound like you had been promoted very quickly.

R I did get promoted quickly. It was a low TLR. I really moved for two equal motives. I wanted to work in an inner city London school to make my cv more comprehensive. Also personal, I moved to H..... and my girlfriend was supposed to be joining me. But that didn't work out and decided I wanted a complete life style change.

P - So you are now in London. How easy is it to continue your guiding principles for teaching? The principle of getting people to love learning. How easy has it been to continue with those guiding principles.

R- Massive question. To a degree I have been given a significant amount of professional liberty here. Complete responsibility. To the extent that any intervention from above is supportive but not authoritative. I can imagine that it would not be like that in other places. I can see there being a more dictatorial regime where you don't feel any liberation whatsoever.

P - Why do you think it has been like that?

R - I don't know. I would like to think that people can see that I am able to do the job to a high standard. The first year that I moved here , I quickly changed specification and the schemes of work and the way that students were grouped. I set up an AS entry for those students who had completed GCSE in Year 10. The results were fantastic in my first year. 91 percent got the full course got A to C. The residuals were great. The average grade in the school at that time was a c and in RS it was a b. This allowed me to do what I wanted to do.

P Has that environment changed at all?

R No, it is much the same. Whether I can achieve it on a regular basis . This is something to think about. I have a lot of content to get across. don't get the time I would like. Full course GCSE in an one hour week over the two years. The time that the exam boards recommends for the short course. Exploration of the material is cut short. It is replaced with the content and 'lets apply it to exam questions'.

P Tell me about a critical moment or incident that has helped you learn in practical terms as a teacher? A critical incident in a lesson where there has been a big learning curve.

R Interesting. One today with one of our statemented students. I try and get the pupils away from subject content sometimes as a way of getting them to look at a skill. So you can look at a cartoon clip of Bart Simpson and see how a story can have different sides. This is great way of doing things. It is consistent with my moral approach. Get them to look at both sides of an argument and generate their own ideas.

P So watching Bart gets them to lead on a idea that a story can have two sides and then apply it back to a subject specific situation?

R- I have seen it happen. I started it at the beginning of the year. I haven't fully evaluated it yet. In Year 10 I used a ten minute clip from the TV series Traffic Cops. A cyclist had been killed on the road. At the first glance, it looked bad for the motorist.

The driver had not stopped and it looks like they have the blame. But then the driver is traced and they find out that it was pitch dark and driver thought she had hit an animal. She pulled over in a state of shock. The police told her that she had killed somebody. Then on hearing this she was physically sick.

P - The evidence is not so straightforward.

R - Yes. The cyclist did not have any lights. They did a test on them and found that they had been drunk. There are no lights on the A road but cars do speeds of upto 70 miles an hour. So don't make a decision until you have assessed the evidence on both sides.

P - The key issues are the same now as they were 7 years ago with your teaching? Your guiding principles on a sense of doing the job well?

R - No, that has remained the same. If I don't feel that I am doing the best from my job I am disappointed with myself. I don't need my line manager to say anything. I judge myself very harshly. It's a duty that I agreed to commit all part of me too. If I don't meet my own expectations I fall out with myself.

P - You are judging yourself all the time, whatever Ofsted is doing or internal inspections.

R - Completely yes. That's the expectation of the professional. I find the whole idea of Ofsted, people with the power to judge you 'unsatisfactory' very bad. It creates an artificial scenario in your classroom which affects performance in itself. So I don't see it as a fair test.

P We can talk about Ofsted again. But for now when I say the words 'learning difficulties' what do you see in your head. How do you make sense of the term learning difficulties on a day to day basis?

R - Anything that acts a barrier for a person being able to intellectually develop themselves. Interference for a pupil from sitting in a lesson and participating in what is going on.

P That's how you see it despite all the fancy terms.

R- Yes. Sure.

P How do you cope with the notion of possibly the government and the school that every mainstream teacher is a teachers of special needs?

R - I think it is very difficult. Different teachers are skilled to varying levels which makes it the case that one teacher may be more be able to deal with one sort of difficulty than others. I think it makes it more difficult when students who have defined difficulties are

placed in a classroom where there are also the needs of another 25. Something I find personally very difficult to do. I feel my strength as a teacher is able to provide one on one feedback to motivate a student . I personalise my conversations to what that individual wants to achieve in their life. Link their targets into what they do in the lesson. It helps you get to your ultimate goal. But in certain areas I just feel de-skilled. I can think of one student and I am not quite sure what I can do to try and engage him with the learning that is going on in the classroom.

P Is this a student with special needs. Give me an example of when you are feeling that way and can't work out what to do?

R Yeah. (pause) I had to move a student. Not actually the one with the learning difficulty but one next door. I didn't do it in a confrontational way. It was a supportive measure. But they were chatting to each other. Emotionally, I could see that this boy was much happier with the girl but when I moved her he was not happy with it at all. He had a little bit of a tantrum and it was very difficult for me. I had to make a judgement call. First I spoke to the children and said that it was very nice that they were enjoying each others company but it was important that you do actually leave this classroom having learnt something. So if that has to mean that I must move you then I will take that step. I did that a couple of times but it just didn't stop them doing it. I wouldn't participate in his argument after his little tantrum.

P Looking back on it, would you do the same again? Were you put in an impossible position? Did it work out ok?

R- The next ten minutes the boy with the learning difficulties was not very happy and didn't do any of the work. The girl worked very well and must have met at least two of the three learning objectives. It wasn't until the teaching assistant started reinforcing the message that he actually started to do some of the work. By the end of the lesson I was able to look at his work and say he had done something he could be proud of. But the fact was that during the lesson it had taken up a heck of a lot of time. One person out of 27 that were in the classroom.

P - So in terms of the 50 minute lesson. Negotiating that with the one person. How much time was that for you and the LSA?

R- Collectively. I don't know. A lot. One fifth of my time. The LSA was also sitting next to another person, so about half of her time.

P - It sounds like a student with behaviour and emotional difficulties. - whatever else was wrong.

R - Absolutely.

P - You have some issues with the statement that every teacher is a teacher of special educational needs ? Not theoretically but practically?

R - I think its difficult to say that. My teaching style relies on having a positive relationship with the students. And because of the subject I teach, I only see the students for one lesson a week. If I was an English teacher who saw my students three or four times a week, I would be more inclined to agree with it.

P - The once a week class - yes.

Training section Inset. (Extract used on the 29.6.12 Mental /Emotional Differentiation workshop run twice for 30 staff - a mixture of mainstream teachers and learning support assistants)

P Tell me an occasion, when the phrase 'every teacher is a teacher of Special Educational Needs ' is something you've got absolutely perfect. A textbook example of what the school and the government wants.

The perfect classroom teacher.

R - uuum. The most recent thing I can talk about is that student that I talked about at the start of today's interview. A statemented student who in the past has been very difficult to engage in learning, he has had behavioural issues , could not initiate conversations with his fellow students. I am really not sure why. I can't take credit for this personally . I suspect that his key worker has got a lot to do with it. He is now so keen to get praise from people that his vocabulary is stretched to such a degree that I am genuinely astounded by it. The amount of work he is producing is actually , in terms of concentration for a much more prolonged period of time. He has grasped that concept of 'evaluation'. Because now he aspires to achieve the highest level possible even though his level is much lower than other people in his class, it has not put him off. I remember having a conversation with him and its great to motivate him by saying ' You are a bright young man ' you can do this!'. When you sit down and concentrate for more than 3 minutes, the work that you do is very very good. You can see that he responded to that praise and being celebrated for the contributions and it really has worked.

P That was the key thing. You became a successful teacher of a pupil with learning difficulties there because of the positive um. He did something right and you picked up on it and reinforced it and reinforced it. Is there something else?

R No that's right. But it's not just a strategy for pupils with SEN. It would be my universal teaching strategy. Motivation plays a massive part in driving students to achieve higher levels and grades.

interruption.

P Yes. Ok. That's when you do it and it went just right. Tell me an occasion when you as a mainstream teacher have not been a successful teacher. And its all gone completely wrong. That earlier example did not seem really 'full on' to me.

R - Lets use the example I used earlier. Because when the answer is ' I don't care' , that for me is where do I go now?

P - So that's what the pupil said to you earlier. You had moved the girl away and he wouldn't do the work. He was saying I don't care and you were 'stuffed'.

R- Ok , I had to then change my tack. They were rebelling against my quest of motivation for them to achieve. That's a real shame. I said that's a shame because - when you do try and think hard, you produce some really good work. You have to change tack. When apathy takes over, then that's when I feel at my weakest.

P What goes through your head and into your mindset . You obviously tried to change tack. But how difficult is it to do that?

R - It's very difficult and it's why I get frustrated. I probably see more students than other members of staff and that's why I think I get more frustrated.

P - There are times you have done well. How do you cover your disappointment and frustration if it's a tough one? Do you keep going? How often do you majorly turn it?

R- I quell my frustration but I don't hide my disappointment. I want them to see that. It's my way of conveying a message that you are not doing what I know you are capable of and that upsets me. I will very happy personalise it like that. I want you to do the best that you can and do well in my subject. If you care about it like I care about it. So I quell my frustration but not my disappointment.

P - But how do you quell it?

R -Sit on it. Play squash at the end of the day. Because it does create stress.

P - But the end of the day could be hours away. At that moment when someone has stung you, slapped you in the face with being utterly apathetic.

R- I suppose I take comfort in the fact that if student is going to be like that, then I will just allow them not to do it for five minutes. Maybe if they are doing nothing, then they are calming down a little bit if they are annoyed. A bit later or at the end of the session, I will show them somebody else's work of a similar standard and say look what this person was able to do in the time you were feeling sorry for yourself and didn't care about your work.

P - What effect would that have?

R- Or I could show them a fantastic piece of work that they have done before and then say, 'I know you can do it!'. Your book is full of examples of the fact that you can do it.

P - So you really are able to effectively mask your feelings whilst showing them your personal disappointment at the fact that they have let you down? They don't guess that you are so frustrated and exasperated.

R- The toll comes out later. Absolutely. (laughs)

End of the training session recording of transcript excerpt.....

P - What sort of training have you had at this school ,or in any school before, that has helped you to work with pupils with learning difficulties?

R - Some at PGCE. But it was largely theoretical and did not get a chance to apply it. 2 or 3 days of lectures and seminars. But it was a pure lottery as to whether you got a placement that gave you the chance to use what you had learned. Your subject based mentor may not have given you the right timetable. I did have one student with behavioural difficulties. My subject tutor was good and she tried to get me to mentor him. It was just one to one situation. I found it very difficult because he was a difficult, really obnoxious kid. But it was not the teachers role , and he could just talk to me. I could talk to him with a much higher degree of flexibility and generate a relationship of trust. Four or five weeks into the placement, I was telling a girl off and she was arguing with me outside my class and he walked past and said to the girl 'don't say that to Sir, he's alright'.

P - Maybe I've led you slightly. But you are talking largely about students with learning difficulties from the emotional behavioural stand point. That's what you have focused when I asked what did college or this school do to help you with learning difficulties. Are the pupils with challenging emotional and social behaviours what most readily comes to mind when I said learning difficulties ?

R - I think it does.

P - You didn't immediately think speech language communication difficulties or low levels of literacy? Dyslexia. No - its emotional and behavioural.

R- I think it is. I find that the most challenging. Speech and Language I feel quite confident in my ability to get some pupils to make some degree of progress. The nature of behaviour is so unpredictable, it is the one that I feel the least in command of.

P - Do you think you have reasonable training for some of the other learning difficulties? Pupils with poor reading or writing skills. Poor communication. Or you picked things up , irrespective of what this school or other schools/PGCE have done with training.

R- That's interesting your observation. I don't think I have had that much training. Things like dyspraxia. Proper tips etc. You go with what works. You pick things off with other people. One of the ideas that I had the last friday night session of the Teaching and Learning conference is that we don't share enough of the ideas of what works. I devised my first activity around it, Lets talk to each other about what works with different types of kids. We only get a chance to do that unofficially. There is no definitive answer about what to do with special needs kids in this school or any other. We need a dialogue about what is valuable and what works.

P - So you may have had a good Autism training or behaviour management training in your first year but they are not sticking in your mind?

R - No it isn't.

P - If I mentioned some alternative ways of training.

R- I don't think all forms of training I have had are completely useless. Sometimes you pick up a few things. The worst kind of training is when you are bombarded with different things that you don't have time to consider or integrate into daily routines.

P - So alternative ways of training. If you had training that revolved around an inset with practical tips, is that very useful?

R - I think it could be. Certain insets go on for hours. Unless it includes the people in the training and allows them to express their thoughts. Articulation can explore different ways of dealing with special educational needs in the classroom. Very often, practical training tips turned into a lecture. It would be much better to focus on 3 tips over the hour and in your groups explore how these techniques could work for you.

P - What about having the Senco or a fellow peer in the subject work alongside or partnership teach in same room at the same time? Work on things together and give each other feedback. How would that feel?

R- I like the idea of that. It is important to meet well in advance and plan the learning that should be taking place. Talk and plan how to differentiate work.

P - Is the meeting in advance actually practical and possible?

R - No, I don't think it really is.

P - So how can it been done if there can't really be a meeting. Will it just have to be done without a meeting? So can it be done properly?

R Its very difficult to do it properly without a meeting. I have a fixed slot each week, one hour after school, where people in my curriculum area can come to me for guidance.

P - How has it worked?

R- Whilst I like the idea myself, people haven't necessarily come . Maybe they are so confident that they do not really need my advice (laughs)

P - You like that kind of partnership. Would you like it to be the Senco specifically or some other colleague in your department?

R- If it was subject related, then meeting up with a colleague from a department would be fine. If it was Senco, it would be great to knock on their door at specific time, when they don't have a meeting. This pupil is presenting certain difficulties, can you advise? Or come and work alongside me in the classroom. If your available at that time, come and advise or team teach with me.

P - Is there anything we are not thinking of beyond the practical tips, the advice and work with the Senco (even allowing for the limitations)? Is there a masterstroke which as a school we aren't thinking of? Or is that the range of opportunities we can think about?

R- Interesting question, but I don't know the answer to it. Ideologically, I would like to say we should be able to meet regularly with other practitioners and share and discuss best practice. But in reality the sheer work load that would create for people. I don't know how you would organise it logistically . This is the kind of thing which sort of happens informally in the staffroom, where people chip in informally. The answer may lie in talking to a wider range of colleagues and seeing if you get any ideas.

P - So what are your practical limitations to doing what you want with your pupils with learning difficulties?

R - The main one is time. I would like to create resources for specific students. But the range of ability and need is such a difficult one to adequately plan for. I can't plan individual lessons because I only see each class once a week. It is such a very wide range of needs. I can't get to the quality I want for every single student.

P What sucks up your time that you resent?

R - That's interesting. I find myself sometimes in meeting and I don't see that I need to be there. Things like briefing. One of my pet hates is to be in one where somebody says 'expect to receive an e mail, sometime later today.' Why not send the e mail without me coming to a specific place at a specific time to tell me you are sending me one. I would like to be able to say that at least an hour at the end of each day would be protected for teachers to plan , to assess and to generate feedback about the kids.

P - So you want an hour for that Monday to Thursday. If you did all that assessment with all of your classes, I mean how do you get your head round all those piles of books? How do you really deal with it?

R - It is very difficult. I have asked that question to lots of members of staff and the only answer coming back is 'find more time to do it'. At the same time we talk about 'staff well being'. The only way I have coped with it successfully this term is to reduce the amount of individual feedback that I give. Not a lot written. I like to give personal feedback. With three assessments a year when you teach in excess of 450 students a week. The feedback I want to give takes about three hours a class. Equivalent of teaching two extra working weeks a year.

P - How many sets of books do you have a week?

R- 19 classes once a week.

P - This is a fascinating and key issue. So you want to do the right kind of assessment with your 19 classes but we want the hour after school protected for planning and liaison. Hazard a guess as to the working day needed to fit all that in?

D- I would like to think it was possible if I taught 3 hours a day with time before and after school. At the moment I know I have to keep on making compromises and cannot do what I want to do.

P - So two non contacts and time before and after school.

R I feel that would give me a chance to do it to the standard I would want.

P - 3 lessons a day and being a tutor.

R- (pause) Yes.

P- So when would you come in and when would you leave, to get it all pretty well done properly like you would like to?

R - I like to come in an hour before the school day starts. I have to rehearse my day. It's part of my routine.

P - So how long after school?

R - 7.30 to 5 would do it.

P - Time is always so important. That's why I am quizzing.

R- Maybe two lessons a day . When I visited Beijing, they could not believe that we often had to do a five period day. They couldn't see how we could prepare so many lessons and do the marking from them.

They did a maximum of two out of five. I think the time was made up with fewer holidays during the course of the year. But they had fewer lessons. It was more of a sustainable approach.

P - So maybe a longer year but a less intense day?

R- Which of course would be a very unpopular strategy . But more sustainable than our current structure.

P - You said you wanted earlier to talk about inspections and what I am going to call the performativity agenda. Does that put any constraint on your working day or does it sharpen and encourage you to work better?

R- It does not encourage me to work better. I feel that Ofsted is an adversary as opposed to an organisation that supports teachers. Its natural for a teacher to be fearful of them. Coming into a classroom and potentially grading a teacher as 'unsatisfactory' without perhaps the full picture. You could argue it is useful to have experts who see a lot of teaching and learning. But it's not really useful because it creates a performance culture which encourages people to drop the ball when they are not there. They come into the school and judge teachers for two days and I don't feel that the teachers themselves are really any part of that process. We should ultimately all be on the same side and be trying to achieve the same goal. The culture is not

primarily one of support. We observe your lessons and if we don't like what we see..... For me observing a lesson is so subjective . Good learning does not happen in such a formulaic way. So what person might take a look at and say is 'outstanding' , somebody else might describe as 'unsatisfactory'. This acts as a straitjacket to me. And it's not just Ofsted in the observation culture that can come and watch me teach.

P - Do you mean your own senior management?

R - I am lucky . I don't really feel like that in this school. Here it is more of a feeling of support. But it doesn't have to be like that and that's the problem.

P - So you have found your feedback from internal inspection to be reasonably helpful?

R - Helpful yes from peer observation. From higher up not really so helpful. I encourage peer observation and team teaching. I think that if somebody comes into your lesson, they should make some qualitative contribution. At the end of the lesson then, let's discuss what went well and what you would have done differently. We are qualified professionals . Our culture should be sharing about what can do and what we think is good. But the culture is that if a lesson is judged 'unsatisfactory' , it can lead to your termination of employment and feels like the sword of Damocles hanging over you head. What is should be is come and watch me teach and maybe I can learn something from you and you can learn something from me. The true power of an observation is neutralised because of the power of those who come in to observe you in an official capacity.

P But you have had some very successful lesson observations but you still feel like that?

R - Yes. But I feel that I have to sometimes change my teaching to deal with the observation.

P - It causes distortion. So I have got a couple more questions. Given the constraints, what are the joys of what you do? If there are any.

R I love the feeling I get when I can see that I have made a difference to a student I have responsibility for teaching. You can see they have figured something out. The eureka moment. I have added something - they have developed a skill or a real understanding.

P - Is that a daily or yearly occurrence? How often do you get that strong vibe?

R- If I didn't get it once a day I would be disappointed.

P - Some days - not at all?

R- I usually get it several times a day. Often it's about the activities I have done. So I need to plan more. I need to create that challenging environment for that to happen.

P - And in your own judgement, that doesn't always happen?

R- You aim for it but it doesn't always happen - no.

P - What do you think I should be doing as the Senco in relation to you as the classroom teacher?

R -- I have personal experience of your contribution to my lessons as a Senco already and it has been very valuable. You have created resources on the spot and given them to me literally as the last student has been walking out of the classroom. That has been very helpful. I know you have done that for other people too. I like the idea of you being in the classroom so you can offer on the spot advice and practical tips. Have you tried, have you thought of doing that? Very often you might model that activity or go away and make that activity.

P Should I ditch my paperwork? Should I ditch my own teaching? Should I do that classroom support as priority across the school? What would be most useful way as Senco to spend my time, in your opinion, as a mainstream teacher?

R- Your time with paperwork would be daunting. I would come to see you if you had a protected hour or an open door strategy. 10 minutes slots. This is the student and I ask for your advice about how to engage or deal with that behaviour.

P - But how many people would be like you?

R- I think its about creating a culture. It's like peer observation of lessons . It's so much more useful to deal with somebody is the same grade as you without official power to do something to you. People would want to come and see you to seek advice. You should consider trying it.

P - I did try and do it with a lunchtime in staffroom regularly on differentiation. But few came and I had to go round the staffroom prompting people. I have got the whole problem of the LSAS being here to 4.30 and complaining that nobody wants to be bothered with them coming to talk to them after school. Teachers want to get on with marking and preparation and don't want to be bothered by talking to LSAS.

R - That goes to that one hour of protected time a day. Teachers concentrating on their own planning and practice. What we talked about earlier. That would be time for the conversation rather than a meeting. I think that every school that wants to have outstanding teaching and learning has got to find a way of giving people the time. If they don't it always going to be aspirational. If it something that has to be done later, it

will happen in time when you are tired and want to go home.

P - There is a fundamental problem with relaxed peer group communication. The system just doesn't allow it.

R- I would like to have some time. We the professionals want time to improve what we do in the classroom with the kids. We need protected time to do this.

P - Is the problem a meeting structure that is looking at how to write a School Evaluation Form or boost performance in public exams?

R- I don't see how what I want can be implemented. Teaching and Learning only seems to be one part of the job for a teacher ,whereas it should be a priority.

P - Presumably the internal inspections that senior management do on a rota system must take up a lot of their time and one might argue that it doesn't lead to more productive and useful conclusion than if there had been peer observation that had felt less threatening. But they would argue that they have to do it because they have to been seen by the outside inspection system to have a grip on performance.

R- Sure. The process of constant evaluation takes people out of the classroom. There are so many different strands to becoming a good teacher. But the most important is your teaching and learning and not pulling out a document about your teaching and learning. The work load of the staff is so difficult. Teaching in a constantly 'outstanding' way is just impossible. I doubt I could do it.

P - So teaching bread and butter lessons is inevitable.

R- Perhaps the very best could do it. In the early stages of my career I was more able to do 13 and 14 hour days and work late into the evening. If I am do my very best I have to prepare for it and that takes time. Doing that five times in one day is very difficult.

My working day is usually 7.30 to 4.30.

P - But that is a reasonable working day.

R- It's a 50 hour week.

P - So you are not trying to short change.

R- Sometimes I even do an hour when I get home. But I struggle to do everything properly. 3 classes a day would make me feel I have a realistic chance.

P - So you are having to juggle imperatives all the time and not doing anything properly?

R- I feel that I am sitting on a ticking time bomb. There is always something that somebody else would consider very important that I just haven't had the time to do. It could be discovered at any moment and then all the good things that I do would be considered as nothing in comparison to my inability to do that one particular task. The most obvious thing is my failure to mark one of my 19 sets of exercise books.

P - So you think we are on a ticking time bomb when inspectors come in because we can't do everything we want to do.

R- You could potentially say that I haven't done my job properly because I haven't marked all my books.

P - And I feel with SEN that I am on a ticking time bomb. And you think you are the same in RS.

R- But could I really work any harder?

P - You could twelve or fourteen hour weeks for three weeks and then be off for a week. The work life balance is wrong.

R- Absolutely. But we spend two hours on the start of an inset day talking about our well being . (laughs) It becomes ridiculous.

P - We are on that semi ticking time bomb.

R I know somebody could come into my classroom and pick up a random set of books and say you are not providing enough feedback. I am angry and I know that one assessment with one class takes two hours at least. With nineteen classes that is 38 hours of assessment.

P - And you want to do that three times a year? I suppose I have fewer classes with much fewer pupils. But then I've got out form filling that takes a lot of my time. Like filling out a CAF form which takes bloody years of time. But you really have loads of books and I have got other types of paperwork. (Laughs) So we are both sitting on time bombs of different sorts.

R- Certainly feels like that. Why can't you create a real culture of exchange where professionals can truly work with each other?

Appendix 6 - JANUARY 2013 Critical Incidents Extract .

I have a new teacher starting in my department. Brought in because of the chaos about 7 SEBD pupils are causing across the school. Wandering around in lessons because they are always getting chucked out. Causing problems by abusing teachers verbally and in some cases, physically. Getting into terrible disputes with other pupils and then going off their heads and having to be held down by three members of staff. As the Christmas holiday approached, most of them were put onto part time timetables, just so we could all survive. Now the new teacher is going to operate a euphemistically phrased 'home based' curriculum in the school and she is going to have the pupils in small groups, together with her for part of the day and they are going to go to their lessons for another part of the day. I have given her two LSAs who will be dedicated to work with her all the time and they will be supporting the small groups with her sometimes or going off to classes with them.

This initiative had only just begun when the Inspectors gave us an afternoon's notice of their two day visit. Immediate panic stations. A lot of the last twelve months has been about the build up for a likely inspection this year but it is still a shock when it comes. I have been trying to make myself draw up the tables and graphs analysing Special Needs interventions impact and looking at pupils on the register against the assessment data for the school. We seem to operate a very commonly used traffic lights system. Pupils are supposed to make 5 sub levels of progress over Key Stage 3. 2 sub levels in Year 7, 1 in Year 8 and 2 in Year 9. The levels or sub levels are based on rather artificial increments of National Curriculum progress. Each level has a wordy description of what it is and so that each sub level. It's all rather artificial and linear. In the real world, there is a kind of jump in the quality of writing and cognition that takes place in a sometimes rather messy and unpredictable way. But the National Curriculum has ignored that inconvenient truth and instead got people moving in a rather rigid linear fashion through a series of rather clumsy artificial progressions. So the whole of secondary school is based on a rather odd kind of teacher assessment. Pupils coming in as being teacher assessed by primary and then being put through a series of reports in which subject teachers move them gradually up the NC levels. Some schools do a kind of reality check on what the teachers are saying by using external cognition tests, but these also have their drawbacks. Teachers in Greenfield feel under pressure to fill in the reports in such a way that shows up 'green lights' on the traffic light system of assessment and not red ones. But I often wonder if they really know what each level, let alone sub level looks like in their subject. Perhaps they are more confident in what they are doing when like me, they start to teach an exam syllabus in Year 10 and have an external set of guidelines to work with.

Staffing. The LSA with the temp contract who I wanted to monitor for a second time since she has been with us, has written a letter back to me saying that it is not right that he should be monitored. Obviously, a mixture of things go through my head. Am I being fair and reasonable? Has he got a point? Am I picking on him unfairly? I know that I am picking on him because I know he is on a temporary contract and I am seeking justification not to continue it. Yet at the same time, I have a gut feeling that X isn't really up to the job and is far short of the level of staffing I am capable of getting at the moment. I want to change the balance and ethos of my team. Do I need to hamper myself with somebody who is so high maintenance and who my instinct tells me will always be a borderline performer.

I had another irritating set back today on another silly paperwork front. The local authority bureaucrats have finally noticed that I have changed and modified the Annual Review paperwork – my pilot 'Moving on, Moving Up plan.' Just six pages long, it produces a short but coherent report, which I designed to answer all the main questions. What the learning need is, what the school does to meet the need, how the provision is allocated. The parent's views, the child's views. What needs to be done in the future? I get everybody present to sign and agree it. It's nice and simple and provides a more coherent narrative than the LEAS paperwork. However after a year of getting them, they have suddenly cottoned on that I'm doing something different. Even though I said at my earlier meetings this year, that I was going to experiment with a new format and pilot something that was going to be a young person's plan. I thought I had got the go ahead to work on that but now my own freeing up of paper work is being challenged.

Dealing with a performance management procedure with young LSA, Annie that has been brought to a head because she has been on a short term contract and it doesn't need to be renewed. This puts me in a strange position. I want to build a better team and know from my last two sets of short listing for LSAs that the economic recession has given me swelling numbers of people who want to do the job. The applicants show promise in many ways. I've got some promising young people with good A levels and degrees from what I would call good universities. They don't always have relevant experience (although many have volunteered into schools) but they do have the kind of intellectual calibre that would allow them to differentiate flexibly in the classroom. They may only stay a couple of years in the job, as they may well get aspiration to train as a teacher or already have that aspiration on entry. But my experience of recently recruiting a person such as this one, is that they have the intellectual flexibility to switch around in different academic subjects and with different academic material.

Another group of applicants have short term contracts from other schools but cannot get a firm footing on the ladder. They are often moving between temporary contracts etc.

I have a conversation with teaching assistant Patricia. She was asking to do a series of early years' courses. I had to point out that we were a secondary school and that we did not have any direct priority for early years. She frustrated - wanting to convert to something else. She feels that her qualification of an HLTA had not led to her getting an HLTA's position. I told her, as I have done many times before that she might have to look for an external appointment and not rely on an appointment here. She expressed the feeling of being trapped. There is a sense of hopelessness. Parents splitting up and she will soon have nowhere to live as the house is going to be repossessed by the bank. The LSA salary is too low to lead to any real hope of renting their own place or maybe even have a room in a flat. There is no doubt that many of my work force are frustrated and set back. Yet at the same time there were 46 candidates clamouring for a teaching assistant's job.

